

Chapter 16

Staff Training and Development in Aquatic Therapy

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In this chapter the reader will learn:

- Barriers to creating a competent and effective aquatic therapy staff
- Critical elements of staff training
- Methods of evaluating staff performance
- Topics for staff evaluation and training
- Options for pursuing continuing education for staff

INTRODUCTION

One of the more challenging issues facing managers of rehabilitation facilities is finding staff adequately trained in aquatic therapy. To fully exploit all of the therapeutic advantages that aquatic therapy can offer, it is important for staffing to be sufficient in number and adequately trained in the essential elements of therapeutic pool operation. This should include techniques for safe pool management, knowledge of the physiologic properties of the aquatic environment, knowledge of established treatment techniques providing for patients with various physiological and psychological characteristics, and the ability to monitor and document progress. For a comprehensive clinical aquatic therapy program, the facilities and staff must be evaluated yearly to determine strengths and weaknesses. Safety and liability issues for staff and clients must be determined.

Academic training in aquatic therapy has been quite minimal. An oral survey of participants at national aquatic therapy conferences revealed many participants stated that they had 1 hour or less of aquatic therapy training prior to attending the conference, and a rare few had 1 week of exposure, while others had exposure only during clinical rotations. In a survey of Detroit, MI therapy training programs in 1999, the physical therapy assistant students at Macomb Community College received 3 hours of training; Oakland University physical therapy students had a 1-hour lecture and a 2-hour laboratory in the pool, in which they practiced using basic pool equipment and the pool lift, discussed transfers, used various flotation devices to support a client on the surface, and practiced passive range of motion, active range of motion, and ankle active-assisted range of motion. Wayne State University physical therapy students had a 1-hour lecture followed by almost 3 hours of pool instruction and practice.