

Undergraduate Physiotherapy Education in Kosova

In partnership with Handicap International (HI), Association of Disabled People of Kosova (HANDIKOS), the University of Prishtina in Kosova, Kosova's Ministries of Health and Education and UNMIK's Departments of Education and Health.

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Overview

Prior to the Bosnian War the country of Kosova had difficulty developing its healthcare infrastructure. These challenges were compounded by political instability and the conflict of the Bosnian War. Rehabilitation services were not provided at the primary care level, the only level of healthcare to which the vast majority of people with disabilities had access. Following the election of the first democratic government in 2001, the international community participated significantly in the restructuring of their



social, political, and economic sectors of Kosova. The ICACBR had worked in healthcare development in the Balkans since 1993, and this project was part of these ongoing efforts and sought to improve access and capacity of rehabilitation services, particularly for people with disabilities.

The ICACBR team implemented the following initiatives in Kosova:

- The project developed and delivered a physiotherapy undergraduate degree. The degree program included 16 courses over three academic years. The courses were translated into Albanian. Local, Canadian, and French physiotherapy educators collaborated to prepare and teach 16 physiotherapy courses, eventually transitioning to an entirely Kosovar teaching staff.
- The project created a faculty development program for eight Kosovar physiotherapy educators. By training Kosovar educators, the project worked towards long-term sustainability for the undergraduate physiotherapy degree and improved post-degree physiotherapy education.
- The project ran many workshops and meetings on physiotherapy for all healthcare providers. These meetings allowed the project to improve the interdisciplinary understanding of physiotherapy, increasing appropriate physiotherapy referrals and Kosova's ability to develop robust policy.
- The project worked to increase the role of physiotherapists within education, as there was a shortage of master's degree or doctorate holders to teach the physiotherapy program.

Background

The country of Kosova faced many challenges due to the conflict of the Kosovo and Bosnian Wars, political instability, and a lack of resources. As a result of these factors, the country of Kosova had difficulty developing healthcare infrastructure and policy that could sufficiently meet the needs of their population. No rehabilitation services were provided at the primary care level, which was the only level of healthcare that the vast majority of people with disabilities in Kosova had access to. Complex systemic issues in the education system precipitated by the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia led to very low levels of training for rehabilitation professionals. The widespread belief that people with disabilities were a financial burden to their families and could not contribute to society lowered the perceived need to improve rehabilitation services. Many physiotherapists in the region did not have differentiated training, instead acting on the instructions of physician physiatrists. Before the implementation of the Undergraduate Physiotherapy Education in Kosova project, none of the physiotherapists working in Kosova held an undergraduate or graduate level degree, making it challenging for them to provide professional advice. This lack of human resources in rehabilitation led to challenges in meeting the needs of the country's disabled population.

The ICACBR had been involved with development of healthcare systems in the Balkans since 1993, and this project was part of an ongoing effort to improve the quality and capacity of rehabilitation sciences in the Balkans. Previous ICACBR work in Kosova had included the training of over 100 community based rehabilitation (CBR) workers and skill development for 35 community physical therapists. This project was intended to be the foundation of long lasting efforts to address the shortage of trained rehabilitation workers in Kosova and improve the lives of people with disabilities.

Rationale

The main goal of the project was to increase the capacity of the country to provide physiotherapy services. In most of Europe (including the Balkans) physiotherapy is taught as an undergraduate program, as opposed to a masters' degree as is common in North America. Kosova lacked a university level physiotherapy undergraduate degree which made it challenging for the country to have an adequate number of trained physiotherapists working there. This project was designed to help Kosova meet the European Union's standards for physiotherapy education, as Kosovar leaders believed this to be a priority as they had been isolated by conflict for the 10 years prior to this project. The project was also intended to help establish the role and scope of practise of physiotherapists in both rehabilitation and education. These were not well identified, leading to inefficient use of resources and challenges for practising physiotherapists.

Actions and Outcomes

The project intended to make improvements in the following broad areas of action:

1. Physiotherapy education.
2. Physiotherapy faculty development.
3. Physiotherapy policy promotion.
4. Project management within rehabilitation sciences and education.

The project worked to improve develop Kosova's healthcare system and rehabilitation services through the following actions:

- The project worked to **create and deliver 16 physiotherapy courses** including content, teaching, and learning resources. These courses **formed an undergraduate physiotherapy program at the University of Prishtine**. 14 Canadian instructors taught the first generation of students, and French instructors taught the second, both with support from local instructors. The project helped transition to local teaching staff for the third generation of students. Resources were generated and translated to ensure that subsequent classes could use them, including a course manual. **The first undergraduate physiotherapists in Kosova graduated in 2004 through this program.**
- **The project supported the Department of Physiotherapy at the University of Prishtine to implement a Physiotherapy Education Program**, which trained faculty for the undergraduate physiotherapy program. Curriculum was developed by the local Faculty of Medicine, Queen's University, HANDIKOS, Handicap International, and the French Red Cross. Learning and teaching materials were developed by the program and translated into Albanian.
- Project efforts oversaw the employment of three physicians and three physiotherapists as faculty at University of Prishtine Department of Physiotherapy. These **educators were trained by the project and given hands-on support in preparation to teach classes**. Canadian instructors reviewed adult learning techniques and emphasized specific course information. The French Red Cross continued this work after the ICACBR had finished this project.
- Due to a lack of qualified teaching staff with a master's or doctoral degree, the project worked to remove this requirement for faculty of the physiotherapy program and have it taught by trained physiotherapists. When this failed, the program worked to increase the capacity of graduate level physiotherapy training at the University of Prishtine.
- **The project helped create a position called "physiotherapy demonstrator", which would teach clinical practise sessions** at the physiotherapy school. While this position did not grant practising physiotherapists a faculty level role, it did contribute to increased quality of training for physiotherapists and acknowledgement of the importance of trained physiotherapists in physiotherapy education.
- The project **contributed to physiotherapy policy development** by increasing the knowledge of healthcare professionals. **Workshops and meetings were held to discuss scope of practise and licensing in physiotherapy**. These discussions included physiotherapists, policy makers, rehabilitation professionals, healthcare workers and representatives from the Physiotherapy Association of Kosova, the Ministry of Health, and Handicap International.
- The project worked with the Ministry of Health to define the scope of practice for physiotherapists. The project also started conversations with the ministry in efforts to include physiotherapists within the framework that regulated other healthcare professionals in Kosova.
- The project organized **meetings and workshops for practising physiotherapists, students, faculty, and other rehabilitation professionals to discuss the development and direction of physiotherapy in Kosova**. These sessions began interprofessional dialogues about the role of physiotherapists and their scope of practise. They contributed to capacity for decision making related to the role of physiotherapy at the policy, education, and community levels.

While the project was able to create an undergraduate physiotherapy program and develop faculty for it, there were three significant barriers. The first challenge was political instability in the region. Prior to 2001 the country had not had a democratic election. When Kosova held its first national election, there was no baseline of policy for healthcare or education, and existing healthcare and education

infrastructure was limited. This led to some organizational challenges when forming partnerships with universities. The second challenge was a loss of funding for partners of the project. Due to a lack of funding, Handicap International and the French Red Cross withdrew from the region in 2005. The Canadian Government pulled out of all programming in Kosova around the same time. While the project was able to work towards improved rehabilitation sciences in the region, this lack of continued funding and involvement was a threat to the project's long-term success. Finally, there was some resistance to physiotherapy reform by Kosovar physicians, as they viewed reform as a threat to their economic opportunities.

Note, that during the duration of this project, partner organizations were also working to improve physiotherapy and rehabilitation sciences in the region through their own independent directives.

Conclusion

The project was able to successfully establish and support an undergraduate physiotherapy program at the University of Prishtina. There were also efforts to begin dialogues around physiotherapy policy, education, and regulation in the region. However, given the project's limited budget, the long-term growth of physiotherapy in the region will require the commitment of Kosovar physiotherapists, support and collaboration from Kosovar physicians, and policy reform that will continue to improve the state of physiotherapy and rehabilitation sciences Kosova.

Partners

Implementing partners: Handicap International (HI), Association of Disabled People of Kosova (HANDIKOS), the University of Prishtina in Kosova, Kosova's Ministries of Health and Education and UNMIK's Departments of Education and Health.

Local/community collaborators: Many local physiotherapists, physicians, rehabilitation service professionals, policy makers, Association of Physiotherapists Kosova, Kosovar government.

International collaborators: School of Physiotherapy in Zagreb and Ljubljana, CARE International, International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), Oxfam.

Sources and Project Resources

1. Undergraduate Physiotherapy Education in Kosova Project Proposal 2001*
2. Assistance to the Disabled in Kosova Final Narrative Report*
3. Undergraduate Physiotherapy In Kosovo Project Detailed website archive*
4. Kosovo Course Manuals Human Anatomy Part 1 and Part 2
5. Learning Resources Kosovo 2002 (Hunt, Booth) Nash Parts 1-5
6. Kosovo Learning Resources Ortho Management Parts 1-3
7. Course Manuals Kosovo
8. Kosovo Learning Resources: Basic Manual Therapy
9. Kosovo Learning Resources: Motor Transformation Basics Course Manual
10. Kosovo Learning Resources: Upper Quadrant Scan Course Manual

*used to generate this report