

## The role of physiotherapy in the public health scenario in Brazil

Physiotherapy is a relatively new profession that emerged during health crises and has been consolidating its mission to help rebuild lives during times of instability, creating something new for what has been lost and, above all, promoting prevention in order to move forward.

Back in the early days of civilization, humans were already using physical resources to treat their illnesses. However, it was in the midst of the horrors of the great wars in the early part of the 20th century, when physiotherapeutic techniques were integrated into medical therapy, that physiotherapy came to the fore as a systematic practice. The humanitarian crisis that resulted in 20 million wounded, in the first great war of 1914 to 1918 alone, showed the importance of physiotherapy in the recovery and reinsertion of the disabled into the workplace and into daily life<sup>1</sup>.

However, it was the viral outbreak of poliomyelitis, resulting in a massive contingent of disabled people, that marked the official introduction of the first professionals linked to physical rehabilitation in Brazil. In the same period, tuberculosis, and the need to reinstate the first victims of industrial accidents into the workplace contributed to the need to create institutions specialized in physical rehabilitation. In this context, the Antônio Carlos Thermal Spa set up in 1932 in the city of Araxá, Minas Gerais, is a good example. In the 1950s, the Benjamim Guimarães foundation was then established in Belo Horizonte, to treat children with tuberculosis, where various physical resources of physiotherapy were applied to restore health. In 1954, the Brazilian Benevolent Rehabilitation Association (ABBR) was founded in Rio de Janeiro, specializing in the treatment of victims of poliomyelitis and people afflicted with motor impairments. The need for specialized labor to serve these institutions motivated the creation of vocational schools in the 1950s, where the first technicians in physiotherapy were trained in the cities of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and, subsequently, Belo Horizonte. The curriculum update and structure for higher education in the physiotherapy and occupational therapy professions only began in 1963, pursuant to Circular No. 388/63. However, these two professions were only regulated in Brazil on October 13, 1969<sup>2</sup>.

Once again, physiotherapy has shown its importance in the current crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. The ventilatory management of critical patients in intensive care units, and intervention in the rehabilitation process of post-COVID syndromes brought Physiotherapy into the spotlight. Protecting lives has become yet another daily task of qualified professionals in the face of the greatest health challenge of the century to date. After all, we are talking here about professionals who are essential for the maintenance of human health. In the words of Dr. Anderson Coelho, president of CREFITO-4/MG, the “Physiotherapists and occupational therapists have gone, in a short space of time, from the dream of first contact professionals to the nightmare of the front line of the pandemic”<sup>3</sup>.

The recognition and realization of how crucial they are for keeping life on track, with better purpose and quality, has been endorsed in this recent period of public health crisis. It is an acknowledged fact that crises foster development and, in line with this, physiotherapy now ranks as a science with recognition for all its 16 areas of expertise.

From rehabilitation to prevention, this would seem to be the scenario for the future. The dream of being a professional working in primary care seems to be the natural course of this profession established during periods of crisis.

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## References

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