



*Musculoskeletal*

## **Musculoskeletal physiotherapy in emergency departments**

...what are the benefits?

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The available studies of the physiotherapists' role in emergency departments (EDs) show varied quality and different functions according to settings and professional training.

Nevertheless, physiotherapy showed the same or better performance when compared with usual emergency care in pain, disability, and waiting time reduction, use of imaging resources, total cost of care, and patient satisfaction.

ED overburdening is a major concern for healthcare systems. As a response, physiotherapists have emerged as healthcare providers in EDs, especially for patients with musculoskeletal disorders. However, their scope of action is still highly variable across countries and professional regulations.

Fifteen studies involving 30,476 patients were found to be eligible. The Effective Public Health Practice Project (EPHPP) Quality Assessment Tool was used to assess methodological quality. Six, five, and four studies had a strong, moderate, and weak quality rating, respectively.

Patients seen by physiotherapists usually had semiurgent to nonurgent injuries, or MSKD, and were frequently considered stable cases. No adverse events or increase of repeat presentation were found after usual physiotherapy care.

Overall, the review found a positive effect of physiotherapists' intervention in EDs. Given the limited amount and varying quality of available studies, as well as broad variations in the scope of intervention across countries, further investigation is still needed.



## Expert opinion

This review highlights the potential role of physiotherapists in both improving patient care and satisfaction, as well as in resource optimisation in EDs.

Although it is a relatively recent trend, available evidence shows the benefits of including physiotherapists for handling selected cases.

These findings should serve as a basis for redesigning emergency teams in a wider range of countries, providing the involved professionals have appropriate training.

> From: Matifat et al., *Phys Ther* 99 (2019) 1150-1166. All rights reserved to American Physical Therapy Association.  
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