Professionalism in foreign arenas: a case study of physical therapy in non-medical settings

# Background:

Under Israel's National Health Insurance Law (1994), the Ministry of Health is responsible for providing medical services in the country; however, under the Special Education Law (1988), physical therapy (PT) services, as well as other allied health services (e.g. occupational therapy, speech therapy), are provided by the Ministry of Education within schools. The allied health professionals are defined within the education system as "instructors from healthcare professions". Their practice is grounded on humanistic educational and ecological approaches, adhering to principles emphasizing a concept of quality of life - a person with special needs has a right to proactively participate in society. This educational concept, alongside the International Classification of Function and Health (ICF) model, constitutes the foundation of the physical therapy practice in the education system (Ministry of Education 2016). Presently about 400 physical therapists are employed by the Ministry of Education. As a result of these laws, most PT intervention for children with motor disabilities in Israel occurs in educational settings (schools) – not in medical settings. This raises the question of how the educational work setting influences the professionalism of physical therapists.

# Objectives

To examine practice and professionalism of physical therapy in non-medical settings.

1. To map the clinical and organizational challenges and opportunities among pediatric physiotherapists working in education system.
2. To identify and compare the perception of physical therapy practice as perceived by physiotherapists, children with motor impairments, and the physicians who refer the children to PT intervention.
3. To describe the professionalism, training, and professional development, of pediatric PT's practicing at the education system.

# Methods:

A mixed-methods research study:

* In-depth interviews with policy makers, pediatric PT's working at education system and clinical and educational partners.
* Focus groups with children with motor impairments.
* Professionalism questionnaire: Professionalism in Physical Therapy: Core Values Self-Assessment-PPTCVSA

# Data analysis

* Qualitative content and thematic analysis

# Uniqueness and relevance to the National health Insurance Law

This research aims to evaluate the PT interventions offered to children with motor disabilities within the special education system in Israel. It will assess the need for specialized professional development for pediatric physical therapists in the educational environment, adhering to Patient Centered Evidence Based Practice.

# Possible policy recommendations

The research will evaluate the appropriateness of PT intervention in a non-medical setting, and will be a basis for assessing other health professions in these systems.