

Misleading information on scope of practice of Accredited Exercise Physiologists

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Exercise & Sports Science Australia (ESSA) has been made aware that there was a web page and fact sheet produced by another professional association which includes misleading information about the scope of practice of Accredited Exercise Physiologists (AEPs). As the peak professional association and accrediting body for AEPs, ESSA was not contacted or consulted in the production of this information.

Accredited Exercise Physiologists undertake a minimum four-year university degree which includes the most in-depth and extensive training of any profession in clinical exercise treatment in Australia.

ESSA always welcomes collaboration with other professions in the name of health promotion, health literacy and patient-centred care. We advocate for a multidisciplinary team approach, and we thrive in team-based environments.

Exercise physiology is a fast-growing profession that creates positive impact on health outcomes and delivers value for money in the health system. It's surprising that this professional association feels the need to compare to AEPs, when other professional associations can see the benefits of working collaboratively to achieve positive health outcomes.

Scope of practice

The presentation of standards and scopes of practice is a matter for the profession concerned and it is inappropriate for another profession to assume this responsibility. As the accrediting body for exercise physiologists, it is therefore of grave concern that this information was produced without ESSA's consultation and endorsement.

There are several elements of the fact sheet produced that are framed in a negative way for exercise physiology and the information presented is incomplete. The lack of completeness about the presentation of this fact sheet, leads to inferences that the work of exercise physiologists could be viewed as unsafe because of the regulatory framework utilised. There is no explanation of what is actually in place to ensure quality and integrity or how this works.

It's pertinent for any professional body to responsibly produce unbiased, evidence-based information for public viewing. ESSA is extremely disappointed that this association has not collaborated to ensure the production of this material. ESSA has reached out previously with an offer to collaborate on a similar document, which was rejected. At the time, the concerns raised by this association included that it was inappropriate for one profession to comment on the scope of another. There appears to have been a shift in this thinking where this association now feels emboldened to present a fellow allied health profession in a negative way.

Regulation for accredited exercise professionals

Accredited Exercise Physiologists are not registered with The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) because the risk to the public through their professional practice is low and therefore the government does not need to take on this added regulatory burden.

ESSA adheres to the standards set by an independent body, the National Alliance of Self-Regulating Health Professions (NASRHP). NASRHP aims to facilitate national consistency in quality and support for self-regulating health professionals and satisfy national and jurisdictional regulatory requirements, and sets standards that closely align with those implemented by AHPRA.

ESSA and the NASRHP provides assurance to patients they are receiving a quality service from a certified health professional.

What's next?

ESSA will continue to work with Government, NDIS, Aged Care, private health insurers, hospitals and the community to ensure that all populations benefit from the delivery of clinical exercise. We will also continue offer to collaborate in the development of accurate information that will support consumers, referrers and funders to understand the different roles allied health professions have in the health care system and how we can achieve patient-centred care through effective interprofessional practice.

There is a health workforce shortage in Australia. Producing unhelpful, misleading information of this nature adds confusion, places further burden on patients, impacting the allied health care professionals trying to make a difference. Rather than taking a functional, holistic approach to patient care, information presented in this way takes a micro lens to addressing a macro issue.

ESSA seeks a public apology and retraction of this content from this professional association for misleading Australian consumers, referrers and funders of healthcare.

The APA Valuing Skills Series

Physiotherapy and exercise physiology

What's the difference?

In Australia, physiotherapists and exercise physiologists are both healthcare professionals who play distinct roles in promoting physical wellbeing, but their areas of focus and expertise differ.

Ensuring a safer healthcare system

When comparing physiotherapy and exercise physiology, it is important to note that each profession must remain within its scope of practice to ensure patient safety and quality healthcare.

Safety and scope are safeguarded by the [National Registration and Accreditation Scheme \(NRAS\)](#).

The NRAS is important because it ensures that all regulated health professionals are registered against consistent, high-quality, national professional standards. Physiotherapy became one of the first professions to be nationally regulated with a National Board in 2010.

This is our first differential

As registered professionals, physiotherapists have both professional and legislative requirements to remain within scope. Exercise physiologists are not regulated under the NRAS.

Scope matters

Both physiotherapists and exercise physiologists can help to improve the lives of those living with acute and chronic health conditions but each has a different set of responsibilities.

Here's a breakdown of the main differences.

Physiotherapy

Physiotherapists are both internally and externally regulated.

The physiotherapist can be the first port of call for musculoskeletal conditions.

Physiotherapists can diagnose. If a musculoskeletal condition has not yet been seen or diagnosed, the patient should see a GP or physiotherapist first.

As first contact professionals, physiotherapists provide a range of first-line treatment options using a broad scope of practice across the life span.

A physiotherapist uses education and advice, movement, exercise, physical rehabilitation and manual therapy.

Exercise physiology

Exercise physiologists are self-regulated.

An exercise physiologist supports patients with exercise when safe to do so.

Exercise physiologists do not diagnose. Patients should see a GP or physiotherapist first for diagnosis and to determine the optimal treatment pathway.

Exercise physiologists offer a range of services, which include behavioural coaching, health education, exercise counselling and physical rehabilitation.

The main approach used by exercise physiologists is exercise alongside education strategies.

For further information, download our [APA The Valuing Skills factsheet](#) that further explains the differences between a physiotherapist and an exercise physiologist.