

Physical therapy in Peru

Physical therapy emerged in Peru as kinesiology from the educational field, to then become established as another branch in hospital environments*.

On September 1st, 1943, the Kinesiology course was created on the School of Education of Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos (UNMSM) in the graduate modality for Physical Education professionals and for professionals of other health areas, via Decree no. 2,396 of the government of Manuel Prado Ugarteche. Kinesiologist María Barrantes Sánchez was one of the professionals who stood out the most in this generation by promoting Orthopedic Gymnastics in national schools, starting what would then be the departments of kinesiology – nine departments were created from this approach. Alongside other professionals at that time, she also founded the Asociación Peruana de Kinesiólogos (Peruvian Kinesiologists Association – APK) in 1955, and later, in 1958, the 1st National Congress of Kinesiology was held.

The need for specialized professionals in hospital environments arose, which led to the inauguration of the School of Physical Therapists and Occupational Therapists on July 17, 1961, in the social assistance network.

The processes of creating a course are not exclusive or excluding; they are always related to what occurs in neighboring countries. Such interrelations allowed the APK to participate, on November 19, 1967, of the founding of the Latin American Confederation of Physical Therapy and Kinesiology (CLAFK, in its Spanish acronym), a non-profit organization that contributed to the development of the profession in Latin America.

In 1968, Peru underwent a university reform to create the Professional School of Medical Technology of the School of Medicine of UNMSM. At the end of 1969, this led to the transfer of the Kinesiology course from the School of Education to the School of Medicine of UNMSM, where its incorporation occurred to the newly created Professional School

of Medical Technology, thus changing the name from Kinesiology to “Technician in Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation”. That same year, the course was also implemented at Universidad Nacional Federico Villarreal (UNFV), with a duration of three and a half years in both.

In October 1969, the 1st Congress of the Latin American Confederation of Physical Therapy and Kinesiology occurred in Lima, in which all CLAFK member countries participated; the 2nd National Congress was also held in the same year and city.

In 1972, the first class of professionals from San Marcos graduated, obtaining the title of “Technician in Physical Therapy”, and in 1982 the course started to be offered as a bachelor’s degree with a duration of 5 years, being named “Bachelor of Medical Technology in Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation”.

In Peru, our profession is closely linked to ups and downs of national politics. I must stress that, during the 1980s, Peru went through an internal and international conflict, as well as a major economic crisis that led to a great delay in the development of science and education. As a result, professionals lost international contacts and prioritized the creation of the Professional School of Medical Technology.

In 1994, after more than ten years of silence, the APK was reactivated as the Peruvian Association of Physical Therapists (ASPETEFI); from then on we worked to resume our position in Latin America, and to become a member of the World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT) – which occurred in May 1999 during the meeting of WCPT Yokohama (Japan).

Participation at international level, along with our peers, is undoubtedly the best way to bring the development of our profession to other areas. Thus, during the meeting of the Executive Committee of WCPT in 2000 in the Peruvian capital, the Macroproject of Curricular Leveling of Physical Therapy and Kinesiology for Latin America was presented, that has as its main statement the need

* Historia [Internet]. Lima; Asociación Peruana de Terapia Física [cited 1 Nov 2019]. Available from: <http://www.aspetefi.org/historia.html>

to unify criteria about the assignment of titles of physical therapists, making it equivalent to the one used in all countries.

From this project, ASPETEFI works closely with the professors of various universities, managing to establish a profile of the physical therapist professional for the future. This requires the strengthening of theoretical concepts and bases, equating course loads at regional level and university degrees. The next step is to approve specialization programs. In 2006, UNFV pioneered the creation of specialization programs, and the first to obtain the resolution from the dean's office were: Cardiorespiratory Physical Therapy and Physical Therapy for Older Adults; through which another stage in the development of our profession begins.

Currently, 22 universities train physical therapists, with 5,500 professionals registered across the country. The course celebrates 76 years of existence, and all Peruvian physical therapists wish the profession continues to develop to meet international standards.

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