

# History of Physiotherapy

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Physiotherapy or Physical Therapy or PT, is a conservative science of the treatment and management after the clinical examination, assessment and diagnosis of the diseases for restoration of the neuro-musculo-skeletal and Cardiopulmonary efficiencies, managing pain and certain integumentary disorders with the help of physical means like radiation, heat, cold, exercise, current, waves, manipulation, mobilization etc.

Various organizations have defined the Physiotherapy in their own words. Few definitions of them are given below: The APTA defines the physiotherapy as: “clinical applications in the restoration, maintenance, and promotion of optimal physical function.”

Physicians like Hippocrates and later Galenus are believed to have been the first practitioners of physiotherapy, advocating massage, manual therapy techniques and hydrotherapy to treat people in 460 B.C. After the development of orthopedics in the eighteenth century, machines like the Gymnasticon were developed to treat gout and similar diseases by systematic exercise of the joints, similar to later developments in physiotherapy.

The first use of the word physiotherapy is found in German Language as the word “Physiotherapie” in 1851 by a military physician Dr. Lorenz Gleich. The word “Physiotherapy” was coined by an English physician Dr. Edward Playter in the Montreal Medical Journal in 1894 after 43 years of the German term “Physiotherapie”. In his words- “The application of these natural remedies, the essentials of life, as above named, may be termed natural therapeutics. Or, if I may be permitted to coin from the Greek a new term, for I have never observed it in print, a term more in accordance with medical nomenclature than the word hygienic treatment commonly used, I would suggest the term, Physiotherapy”.

The earliest documented origins of actual physiotherapy as a professional group date back to Per Henrik Ling “Father of Swedish Gymnastics” who founded the Royal Central Institute of Gymnastics (RCIG) in 1813 for massage, manipulation, and exercise.

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In 1887, PTs were given official registration by Sweden's National Board of Health and Welfare. Other countries soon followed. In 1894 four nurses in Great Britain formed the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy. The School of Physiotherapy at the University of Otago in New Zealand in 1913, and the United States' 1914 Reed College in Portland, Oregon, which graduated "reconstruction aides."

In the same year four nurses Lucy Marianne Robinson, Rosalind Paget, Elizabeth Anne Manley and Margaret. Dora Palmerin in Great Britain formed the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy.

The establishment of the modern physical therapy is thought to be in Britain towards the end of the 19th century.

The American orthopedic surgeons started treating the disable children and started employing women trained in physical education, massage, and remedial exercise. It was promoted further during the Polio outbreak of 1916 and during the First World War when the women were working with the injured soldiers.

Research catalyzed the physiotherapy movement. The first physiotherapy research was published in the United States in March 1921 in The PT Review. In the same year, Mary McMillan organized the Physical Therapy Association (now called the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA)).

Treatment through the 1940s primarily consisted of exercise, massage, and traction. Manipulative procedures to the spine and extremity joints began to be practiced, especially in the British Commonwealth countries, in the early 1950s.[9][10] Later that decade, PTs started to move beyond hospital based practice, to outpatient orthopedic clinics, public schools, college/universities, geriatric settings, rehabilitation centers, hospitals, and medical centers.

Specialization for physical therapy in the U.S. occurred in 1974, with the Orthopaedic Section of the APTA being formed for those physical therapists specializing in orthopaedics. In the same year, the International Federation of Orthopaedic Manipulative Therapy was formed, which has played an important role in advancing manual therapy worldwide since.

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