

Advocacy Highlights: **Nova Scotia Physiotherapy Association**

Background

Over the last few years, the Nova Scotia Physiotherapy Association (NSPA) has placed a strategic emphasis on advocacy. To turn this emphasis into action, the NSPA sought input from its members regarding potential advocacy goals. The organization then participated in a facilitated process to assess and prioritize those goals, which led to the creation of an advocacy plan. A major recommendation of the plan was the formation of an advocacy committee to guide direction and support the plan's implementation. A consultant, known to the NSPA, was also hired in 2017 for a nine-month period to enhance advocacy capacity and support progress.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the advocacy progress made in 2017.

Key Outcomes

Several key outcomes are the result of the NSPA's advocacy momentum. At a high level, those outcomes include the following:

- Provincial election questionnaire development and results distribution
- Customized material developed regarding physiotherapy in Nova Scotia
- Strengthened relationships with key audiences
- Improved access to advocacy material on the website
- Promotion of issues significant to the NSPA via opinion editorials

Provincial election questionnaire development and results distribution

- In May of 2017, a questionnaire was developed to seek detailed responses from the Liberals, the Progressive Conservatives and the New Democratic Party regarding issues of relevance to the NSPA and its members. The questions asked were aligned with the NSPA's advocacy priorities. There was also alignment with current events at a national level, such as the opioid crisis, having considerable relevance to the Canadian Physiotherapy Association's advocacy efforts.
- Each party returned detailed responses to the NSPA. Those responses were collated and distributed to the membership and placed on the website for public viewing. The responses were then used to develop correspondence with all three political parties resulting in a customized request for a face-to-face meeting.

- Meetings were granted and held with three MLAs from the Progressive Conservative Party (PC) and with the Minister of Health and Wellness. At each meeting, material regarding the NSPA was presented and the advocacy goals discussed. The NSPA made specific requests for support involving its advocacy goals.
- Each meeting resulted in new ideas that the advocacy committee then acted upon. For example, relevant and evidence-based one-page overviews were developed in response to questions from the PC MLAs. The one-pagers were customized material that addressed the state of physiotherapy in Nova Scotia. More information on these documents is noted below.
- The primary outcome from the meeting with the Minister of Health and Wellness was for the NSPA to implement a specific action item from its advocacy plan, which was to build relationships and identify areas for partnership with Doctors Nova Scotia. This was noted, by the Minister, as being especially significant for the purposes of achieving a bigger, more sustained role for physiotherapists in collaborative care clinics.
- Information promoting the NSPA and physiotherapy was also created for the purposes of its use in the Nova Scotia Legislative Assembly.

Development of requested material

- Information that is brief, evidenced-based, and clearly connected to the NSPA advocacy goals are a vital advocacy tool. Making that information available for key audiences and leaving it behind after a meeting enables messages to continue to be accessible. Packages of information were developed for each of the meetings referenced above. However, based on the outcome of those meetings, additional material was developed by the advocacy committee. Specifically, that material included:
 - “Physiotherapy in Nova Scotia.” This document covers issues related to supply and demand as well as access. It was informed by the Conference Board of Canada’s National Profile of Physiotherapy but customized to Nova Scotia.
 - “Physiotherapy: A Crucial Part of Team-Based Health Care.” This document outlines the valuable role played by physiotherapists in delivering comprehensive services and reducing the stress on the system. It was created to mirror the language used to describe the health-based priorities of the current provincial government.
 - Research was also conducted by the advocacy committee to ascertain the number of collaborative care clinics in Nova Scotia currently using the services of a physiotherapist. The purpose was to demonstrate the need for

greater inclusion and to inform the development of an opinion editorial slated for distribution in 2018.

Strengthened Relationships With Key Audiences

- The NSPA has established solid relationships with multiple groups, organizations and government departments. A desired advocacy outcome for 2017 was the strengthening of those relationships, especially with those at a political level and those closely connected to policy issues. This outcome was largely made possible by the members of the advocacy committee being available for meetings to discuss the NSPA and its advocacy goals as well as their commitment to preparing for each meeting. Examples of opportunities that became available and that were acted upon to strengthen relationships include:
 - A meeting held at the Department of Health and Wellness (DWH) to watch a webinar focusing on the demand for physiotherapy services in Nova Scotia. This resulted in a discussion between an advocacy committee member and representatives of DWH regarding the importance of physiotherapists (PTs) in collaborative care clinics and in working to an optimized scope of practice. The meeting concluded with DWH requesting that the NSPA remain a resource regarding a strategy for PT human resources.
 - A meeting was also held with Alice Aiken, Dalhousie University's Vice President of Research. The outcome of that meeting was a change in direction regarding an opinion editorial planned for distribution in October. The role of PTs in reducing the need for opioid prescriptions was selected as the topic due to its relevance at that point in time and its overall significance as an issue. The opinion piece entitled: "PTs: An effective and non-addictive prescription" ran in the Chronicle Herald and was widely shared on social media. In the meeting with the Minister of Health and Wellness, this piece was referenced positively by the Minister. The meeting with Alice Aiken also supported efforts for ensuring that the material developed regarding the state of physiotherapy in Nova Scotia utilized the same language as the current government's stated priorities.
 - Strengthening relationships at a political level was also a key outcome of 2017. This was accomplished through the preparation, meeting time, and follow up of the meetings with the Minister of Health and Wellness and the three PC MLAs.

Improved access to advocacy material on the website

- The NSPA website was redeveloped and launched in 2017. This change has allowed for the organization to promote its advocacy efforts, its opinion pieces and to identify a contact for media inquiries. These are significant steps and demonstrate a renewed level of operational sophistication. They provide ease of access to relevant and timely opinion pieces and show the commitment of the

- NSPA to advocating on behalf of its members. It also offers media information about PTs and a person to speak with regarding questions and story ideas they may have.
- Another advocacy initiative was to review the current Twitter account of the NSPA. This was completed and short-term results included acquiring a few key followers.

Promotion of issues significant to the NSPA via opinion editorials

- The NSPA recognized the value of making a significant effort to ensure its voice was consistently heard in the public realm on matters that were both timely and connected to its advocacy goals. As a result, three opinion pieces were developed and distributed to all provincial media and via social media.
 - “Resolving to Move More and Move Better” (January 2017)
 - “Concussion Management: The First and Vital Step” (July 2017)
 - Due to the relevance and complexity of this issue a Frequently Asked Questions document was developed in support of aiding greater understanding of how PTs support concussion management.
 - “Physiotherapy: An Effective and Non-Addictive Prescription” (October 2017)
- Overall, the opinion pieces were well received and, depending on the piece, resulted in media attention via use in print as well as television. Another important outcome of these pieces was through social media sharing and the demonstration that the NSPA is actively expressing its expertise.
- Another opinion piece is planned for distribution in early 2018.

Conclusion

While there is always more to do, NSPA advocacy in 2017 was successful on many fronts. A measured, sustained, flexible, and strategic approach to making progress has been the hallmark of our efforts.