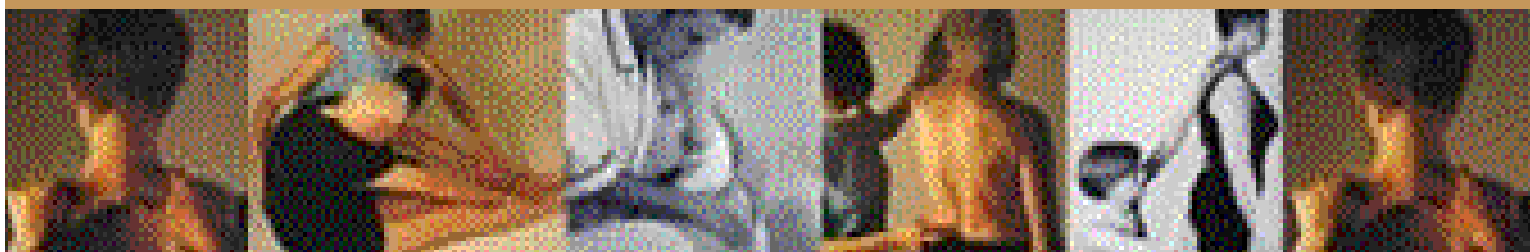


# EVALUATION OF THE TUAM AND GORT COMMUNITY PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES



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# **EVALUATION OF THE TUAM AND GORT COMMUNITY PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES**

**Report Prepared on Behalf of the Primary Care Unit**

**By**

**The Department of Public Health  
Western Health Board**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Primary Care Physiotherapy Service in Tuam and Gort Health Centres opened in October 1996. It provides a community based service for GP referrals and offers an alternative to hospital facilities such as University College Hospital Galway (UCHG) and Merlin Park Regional Hospital. Prior to the introduction of this service GPs were unable to refer patients directly to UCHG or Merlin Park Regional Hospital for physiotherapy; a referral had to be made by a consultant. The service aimed to be more accessible to users, reduce waiting times, and improve communication between patients, GPs, and physiotherapists in the diagnosis and treatment of patients.

The aim of the study was to provide an evaluation of the community Physiotherapy services for patients using the Tuam and Gort Health Centres. The evaluation comprised a survey of patients and a survey of GPs.

The survey of patients established that:

- Ø Patients using the scheme have appointments with the Physiotherapist relatively frequently, with the majority having treatment once a week or more often.
- Ø There are long delays getting the first appointment with the service, with an average wait of five weeks.
- Ø Waiting times for the second appointments are significantly less, with the average waiting time less than two weeks.
- Ø Patient demand appeared to exceed the level of service provided, resulting in a backlog of appointments.
- Ø Benefits of treatment to patients included pain relief, increased mobility, and decreased level of impairment.
- Ø Three quarters of patients reported that their physical health was better than when they first started receiving treatment.
- Ø 71% believed their quality of life had improved since receiving the treatment.
- Ø The vast majority of patients attending the Health Centres believe that the service provided is excellent or good, with the vast majority satisfied in terms of the range of different criteria.

The survey of GPs established that:

- Ø Despite good communication links between GPs and Physiotherapists, over one third of patients referred by GPs to the service were unable to receive treatment, and had to be referred to alternative treatment centres.
- Ø All GPs surveyed were unhappy with long waiting times, indicating that patients were re-referred to other treatment services due to long waiting times.
- Ø The majority of GPs are happy with the current referral process, however 40% of GPs felt that the waiting times between referral and first appointments took longer than when using an alternative Physiotherapy service.

A number of recommendations are suggested in order to ensure that the Community Physiotherapy Service operates to its full potential.

- Ø Efforts to increase GP's utilisation of the community Physiotherapy service should be made.
- Ø There is a need to reduce waiting times to ensure patients are not re-referred to alternative services. Waiting times for the first appointment should be targeted for intervention.
- Ø Existing referral criteria should be examined to establish if improvements are required.
- Ø Consideration should be given to expanding the existing service to cope with existing demand.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

Primary care is provided by a broad range of individuals and groups, which includes employees of the Western Health Board, self-employed Practitioners and the voluntary sector. The Western Health Board propose that it will be able to provide primary care services that are appropriate and adequate for the population that it serves.

Primary care has been defined as the following:

*"Primary care is an approach to care that includes a range of services designed to keep people well, from promotion of health and screening for disease to assessment, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation as well as personal social services. The services provide first level contact that is fully accessible by self-referral and have a strong emphasis on working with communities and individuals to improve their health and social wellbeing."*

Department of Health and Children, 2001

The Primary Care Physiotherapy Service in the Tuam and Gort Health Centres opened in October 1996. It provides a community based service for GP referrals and offers an alternative to hospital facilities such as University College Hospital Galway (UCHG) and Merlin Park Regional Hospital. Prior to the introduction of this service GPs were unable to refer patients directly to UCHG or Merlin Park Regional Hospital for physiotherapy. A referral had to be made by a consultant. This meant that GPs had to refer patients to consultants rather than directly referring the patients to the Physiotherapy service. The introduction of the service aimed to be more accessible to users, reduce waiting times, and improve communication between patients, GPs, and physiotherapists in the diagnosis and treatment of patients.

The Primary Care Physiotherapy service is available for 18 hours per week (9 hours per centre) with one Physiotherapist working in each Health Centre. The Physiotherapists work in the Health Centres for two days per week, and treatment sessions are scheduled for 30 minutes, with 12 appointments scheduled per day. The service is available to General Medical Service (GMS) card holders who are referred by their GP. Within the Tuam and Gort area there are 16 GPs who refer patients to the service. Table 1.1 shows the number of referrals to the service in 2001/2.

**Table 1.1: Referrals to the Tuam and Gort Physiotherapy Service**

Health Centre	Date	New referrals	Patients attending for treatment	Total number of sessions
Tuam	Jan-Dec 2001	258	220	1149
Gort	Oct 2001-Sept 2002	168	150	873

The introduction of the scheme aimed to deliver a number of benefits including:

- Ø Shorter waiting lists
- Ø Quicker treatment
- Ø Less travel for patients
- Ø Providing treatment for patients in the community
- Ø Improved communication between the GPs and Physiotherapists in relation to patients

However, to date the scheme has not been evaluated to establish the extent to which these have been achieved. It is within this context that the Department of Public Health was asked to provide an evaluation of the service.

## **1.2 Aims and Objectives**

The aim of the study was to provide an evaluation of the community Physiotherapy services for patients using the Tuam and Gort Health Centres. The objectives of the research were to assess the impact of the community Physiotherapy service; more specifically to:

- Ø Access to the Physiotherapy services
- Ø Assess referral processes that are in place
- Ø Determine overall perception of key components of the Physiotherapy service
- Ø Assess need and relevance of service to communities
- Ø Examine waiting times for appointments
- Ø Discover the benefits of the scheme for patients and GPs

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The research methodology for the study comprised the following:

1. Survey of Patients
2. Survey of GPs

### **2.2 Survey of Patients**

All 182 patients who had availed of the community Physiotherapy service between January and June 2002 were sent a confidential questionnaire to ascertain:

- Ø Perceptions of key aspects of the community Physiotherapy service
- Ø Impact of treatment on medical conditions
- Ø Suggested improvements to service
- Ø Advantages of having a local Physiotherapy service
- Ø Time taken for referrals
- Ø Waiting time for appointment
- Ø Time taken to get to Health Centre
- Ø Comparisons of regional facilities to UCHG facility

A copy of the questionnaire is given in appendix 1.

### **2.3 Survey of GPs**

The 15 GPs who are involved in the community care scheme were sent a confidential questionnaire to elicit:

- Ø Communication between Physiotherapist and GP
- Ø The referral process
- Ø Perceived impact on patients' health
- Ø Impact of scheme on waiting times for Physiotherapy services
- Ø Benefits produced from scheme,
- Ø Comparisons of regional facilities to UCHG facility

The surveys were distributed to participating patients and GP's in August 2002. A copy of the questionnaire is given in appendix 2.



### 3. SURVEY OF PATIENTS

#### 3.1 Introduction

All patients who had availed of the community Physiotherapy service between January and June 2002 were sent a confidential questionnaire to ascertain perceptions of key aspects of the community Physiotherapy service, and the advantages of having the facility in their locality.

One hundred and eighty one Questionnaires were sent to patients who were involved in this scheme, and ninety nine were returned, giving a 54% response rate.

#### 3.2 Demographic Profile

The average age of the patients surveyed in this study was 60 years. Approximately two thirds of patients were female (72%) and a third (28%) were male. More than half (55%) of patients attended the Gort community Physiotherapy service and 45% attended the Tuam based centre.

#### 3.3 How often patients received treatment.

The majority (49%) of patients receive treatment once a week or more often. Almost one quarter (22%) of patients receive treatment once every fortnight (table 3.1).

**Table 3.1 How often patients receive treatment**

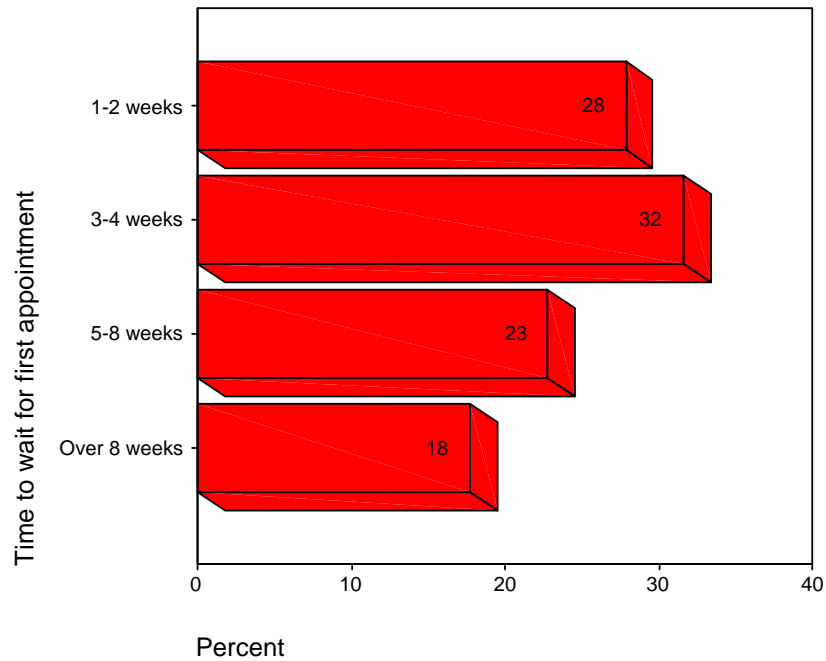
How often patients receive treatment	No	%
2-3 times a week	7	7
Once a week	48	49
Once a fortnight	22	22
Once a month	6	6
Every 3 months	1	1
6 months	3	3
Once a year	5	5
Don't know	1	1

#### 3.4 Length of time spent waiting until first appointments.

The average time patients had to wait for their first appointment was 5 weeks. Although almost a third waited 1-2 weeks (28%) for their first appointment, the

majority (73%) had to wait three or more weeks (figure 3.1). It is also worth noting that 5% of patients had to wait more than 6 months for their first appointment with the community care Physiotherapist.

**Figure 3.1** *Waiting Times*



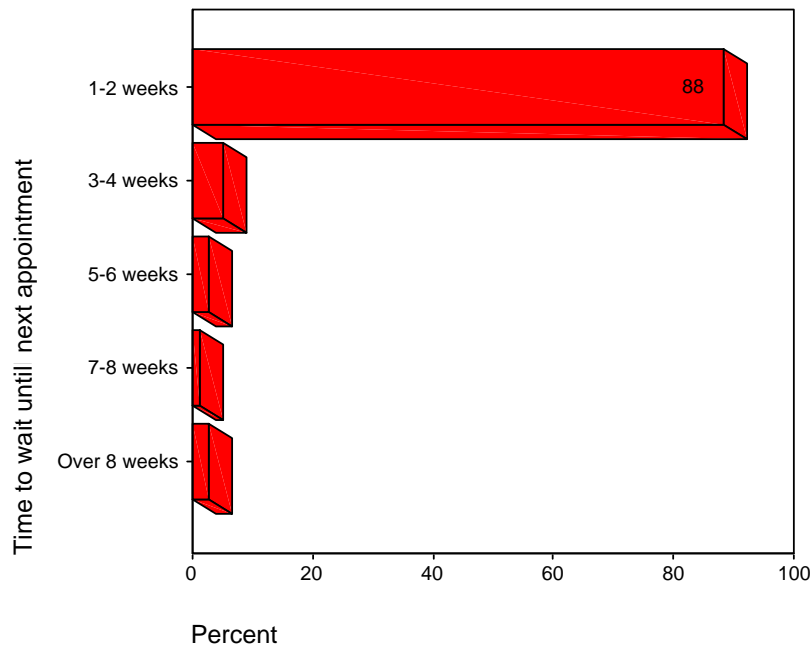
**3.5** *Length of time spent waiting for second appointment.*

Figure 3.2 shows that the average length of time patients had to wait for their second appointment was one and a half weeks. This is significantly less than the length of time patients had to wait for their first appointment (section 3.4). The vast majority of patients (88%) only had to wait 1 to 2 weeks.

**3.6** *Length of time waiting for re-referral.*

In the last six months one quarter (25%) of all patients were re-referred to the Physiotherapist for treatment for a second complaint .

**Figure 3.2 Time to wait for next appointment**



**3.7 Ways in which treatment benefited patients condition.**

Almost all (87%) patients found that they benefited most from the treatment in regard to 'pain relief' (table 3.2). Whilst a high proportion of patients also felt that 'increased mobility' and 'decreased level of impairment' were greatly improved as a result of the treatment provided at the community centres.

**Table 3.2 Ways in which treatment benefited patients**

How treatment benefited patients	No	%
Pain relief	51	87
Increased mobility	44	82
Decreased level of impairment	11	73
Other	0	0

Multiple response, therefore percent may not add to 100

In addition 10% of patients found the Physiotherapy treatment helped their condition in a number of other ways (table 3.3). One in ten patients found that the Physiotherapist helped them to cope in ways such as 'stress relief' and 'increased exercise'.

**Table 3.3 Other ways in which physical treatment benefited patient's condition.**

Other ways in which treatment benefited patients condition	No	%
No change	3	30
Diagnosed condition	1	10
Rehab after a stroke	1	10
Help to relieve stress	1	10
Better able to cope with my condition	1	10
Gets me out of the house	1	10
Exercises improved my condition	1	10

### **3.8 Improvements in physical health.**

As can be seen from Table 3.4 the majority of patients (41%) felt that their physical health was 'slightly better' now, compared to when they first started receiving treatment from the community Physiotherapist. A third (32%) of patients believed that their physical health was 'much better' following the commencement of treatment at the community centre. Less than one in five (19%) did not notice any difference in their physical health and only 6% felt that their physical health was 'slightly worse' than when they first began to attend the community-based service.

**Table 3.4 Patients physical health compared to when they first started receiving treatment.**

Patients physical health	No	%
Much better	31	32
Slightly better	39	41
About the same	18	19
Slightly worse	6	6
Much worse	2	2

### **3.9 Explaining treatment.**

Almost all patients (91%) stated that the Physiotherapist had explained why they were receiving the treatment for their condition.

### **3.10 Ways in which the Physiotherapy service could be improved**

When asked if there was any aspect of the Physiotherapy service patients would like to change, the majority (40%) of patients felt that they could not find any major fault with the service and were happy with how the service was being run (table 3.5). However, almost one in five (18%) patients cited 'shorter waiting lists for appointments' as a way in which the service could be improved. Another common suggestion among 12% of patients was to introduce more regular appointments and

more frequent follow-up sessions with the Physiotherapist. Other shared suggestions included 'longer treatment sessions' and a 'better equipped service centre'.

**Table 3.5 How the Physiotherapy service can be improved**

Ways in which the service can be improved	No	%
Explain to patients more about their condition	2	3
Listen to more questions from patients	2	3
Shorter waiting lists for appointments	12	18
More regular appointments/follow up sessions	8	12
A permanent Physiotherapist based at the Health Centre	2	3
More hand massage using embrocation creams	1	1
Everything is fine/could not find any fault with the service	27	40
A bigger and better equipped centre	4	6
Longer treatment sessions	5	7
A waiting room	1	1
Access to hydrotherapy	1	1
House calls made by the Physiotherapist	1	1
Car parking facilities	1	1
Transport to and from the centre	1	1
Provision of an acupuncture service	1	1
More Physiotherapists	1	1
Treatment for arthritis	1	1

### **3.11 Additional Physiotherapy facilities.**

Just over one fifth (23%) of patients requested that they would like other Physiotherapy facilities to use when receiving treatment in the community Health Centre. Most patients (77%) however were satisfied with the present facilities and did not request any further facilities to use when attending the community-based clinic.

When asked what other Physiotherapy facilities patients would like to use when receiving treatment (table 3.6) the majority (17%) stated that they did not know what other treatments were available to them. Other possible suggestions included receiving treatment such as 'heat treatment', 'more time to use all the facilities at the centre' and a chiropodist to be available at the centre'.

**Table 3.6 Other facilities patients could use when receiving treatment**

Other facilities patients would like to use when receiving treatment	No	%
A massage to relieve stress and over exerted muscles	1	5
Heat treatment for my neck, shoulders and back	1	5
More time to use all the facilities on offer at the centre	1	5
More hands approach by Physiotherapy with less use of machines	1	5
More information on what other treatment is available	1	5
Liaison with the local swimming pool for physio sessions	1	5
Would like a chiropodist to be available	1	5
Would like a Physiotherapist to give a full-body treatment	1	5
Exercise to help loosen joints	1	5
More regular Physiotherapy sessions	1	5
Physiotherapy treatment for sore ankle	1	5
I don't know what other treatments are available	3	17
A disable car service	1	5

**3.12 Health problems that made it difficult for the patient to use the service.**

Figure 3.7 highlights health problems which make it difficult for patients to get out of their house to attend Physiotherapy sessions. More than one in five (22%) patients reported that they found 'poor mobility' a problem when using the service. More than one in ten (11%) patients stated that 'lack of adequate transport' to and from the Health Centre resulted in poor health among those attending the centre. Almost 10% of patients complained of suffering from depression and/or having difficulty breathing. Other complaints included arthritis, asthma and high blood pressure.

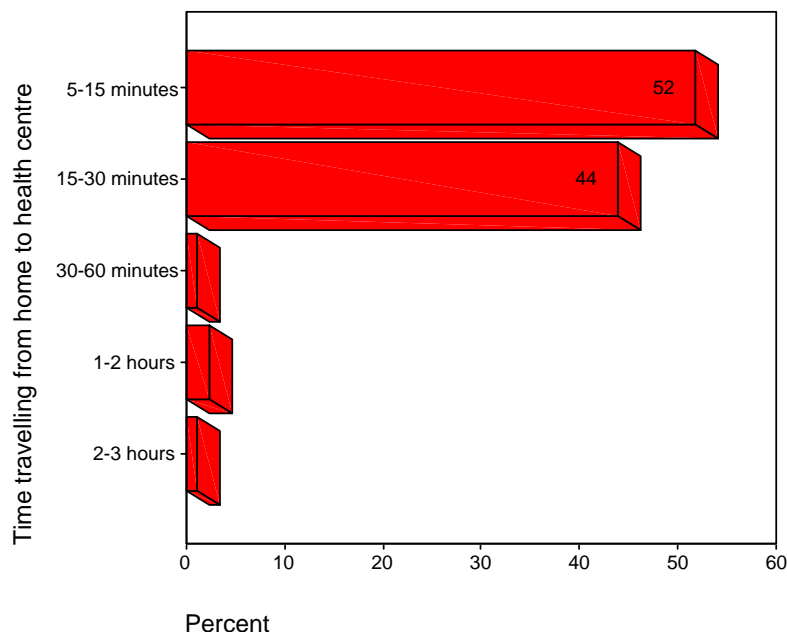
**Table 3.7 Health problems which make it difficult for patients to receive treatment.**

Other health problems suffered by patients which restrict movement	No	%
Paralysis on my left side (due to meningitis)	1	4
Blindness (due to cataracts which are inoperable)	1	4
Severe pain resulting in poor balance/mobility	1	4
Trouble breathing	2	9
Need help getting dressed	1	4
Lack of adequate transport to clinic	3	11
Suffer from arthritis	1	4
Claustrophobia	1	4
Depression	2	9
Asthma	1	4
Trouble getting in and out of bed	1	4
High blood pressure	1	4
Lower back pain	1	4
Poor mobility	5	22

**3.13 Accessing the community based centres.**

The average time it takes patients to travel from their home to the Health Centre is 20 minutes (figure 3.3). For the majority of patients attending the community centres, it took them less than 15 minutes to reach the centre. However a small proportion of patients (3%) spend over 1 hour travelling to the centre. The average distance patients had to travel to the Health Centre was 5 miles, with a car (passenger) being the most commonly used mode of transport among patients.

**Figure 3.3 Travelling Time**



### **3.14 Patients position if Physiotherapy service was unavailable.**

Table 3.8 shows how patients would cope if the Physiotherapy service was not available. The majority of patients (32%) would be forced to travel to Galway for Physiotherapy. More than one in five (21%) patients stated that they would be forced to 'put up with the pain' if the Physiotherapy service was not available to them. Less than 20% of patients admitted that they would not know what to do if the service was not available. Others would have to attend another clinic such as Merlin Park Regional Hospital, UCHG or private practice to receive treatment.

**Table 3.8 What patients would do if the Physiotherapy service was not available.**

How patients would cope without the Health Centre	No	%
Put up with the pain	19	21
Use heat therapy	1	1
Take pain killers	1	1
Self massage	1	1
Go to UCHG	2	2
Go to Merlin Park	10	11
Go to a private Physiotherapist	6	7
Go to Galway (very inconvenient)	28	32
Practice exercises at home	1	1
Attend another clinic	8	9
Complain to the Minister of Health	1	1
I would have to do without	2	2
I don't know what I would do	13	15
Visit GP for treatment	1	1

### **3.15 Overall level of satisfaction with different elements of the Health Centre.**

Over half (61%) of patients were "very satisfied" with the 'ease of getting an appointment to see a Physiotherapist'. Over three quarters (76%) of patients were "very satisfied" with the 'length of time spent waiting for Physiotherapists at each session' (table 3.9). A large proportion (70%) of patients attending the clinic were "very satisfied" with the waiting facilities, with only 3% of patients "very dissatisfied" with the availability of a seat in the waiting room; 78% of patients were happy with the present opening hours. Almost all (86%) of patients reported to be "very satisfied" with the general manner of both the Physiotherapist and the members of staff working in the Health Centre.

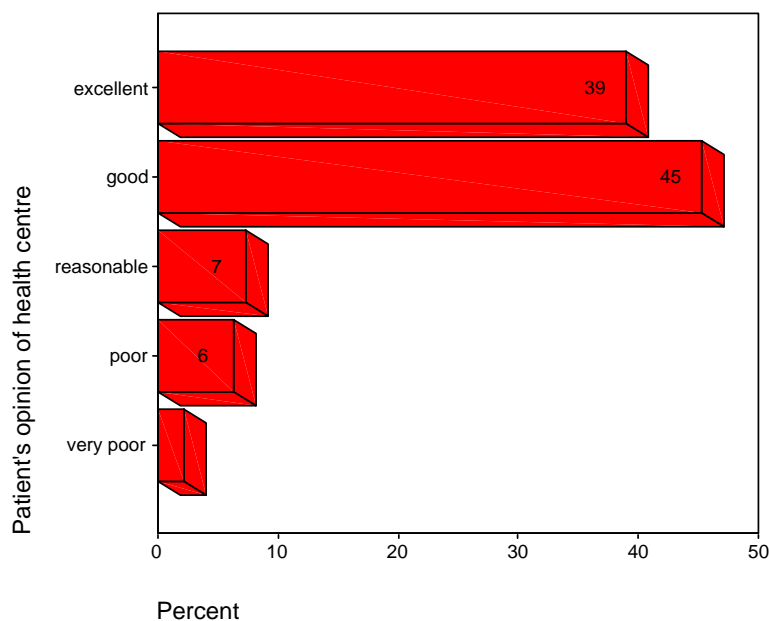


**Table 3.9: Level of satisfaction with the Health Centre.**

Key Elements of Health Centre (1 = very satisfied ; 5 = very dissatisfied)	Satisfied (score 1 or 2)		Neither (score 3)		Dissatisfied (score 4 or 5)		Mean Trainee Rating
	No	%	No	%	No	%	
Ease of getting an appointment to see a Physiotherapist	65	75	8	9	14	16	1.9
Length of time spent waiting for Physiotherapist	82	91	3	4	4	5	1.4
Length of time spent with Physiotherapist at each session	60	79	9	12	7	9	1.6
Waiting facilities at clinic	67	84	4	5	9	11	1.3
Availability of a seat in the waiting room	72	92	1	1	3	4	1.3
Opening hours at the clinic	70	92	5	7	1	1	1.3
General manner of the Physiotherapist at the clinic	73	86	3	4	5	6	1.3
General manner of the staff at the clinic	75	93	1	1	4	5	1.3

The vast majority of patients felt that the overall experience of the Health Centre was that it was either "Excellent" or "Good" (figure 3.4).

**Figure 3.4 Overall opinion of the Health Centre**



### 3.16 Other Physiotherapy treatment facilities.

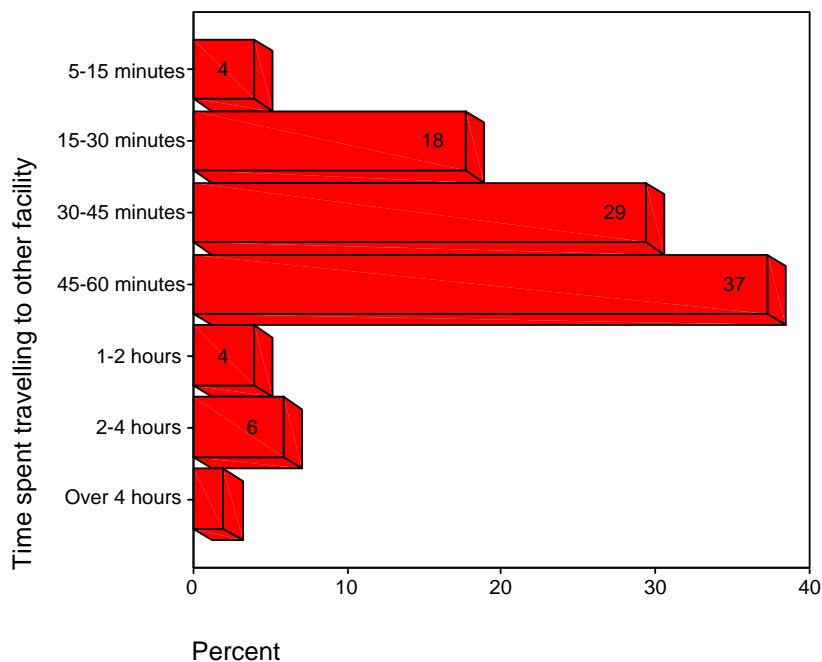
Most patients (66%) surveyed did not have to use another facility for Physiotherapy treatment other than the treatment available at the local centre. Of those who had to use another facility, the majority (62%) frequented Merlin Park Hospital, with 19%

attending UCHG, and 14% using a private Physiotherapy practice (table 3.10). Figure 3.5 shows that the average time it takes each patient to travel to another facility is approximately 30 minutes. The journey took most patients between 45 and 60 minutes. However it took two patients 4 hours and one patient 5 hours to travel to another facility. The average distance travelled was approximately 23 miles; however, one patient had to travel approximately 200 miles.

**Table 3.10 Other Physiotherapy treatment facilities used by patients**

Other Physiotherapy treatment facilities used by patients	No	%
Merlin Park Hospital	32	61
UCHG	10	19
Private	7	13
Portiuncula	1	2
Other	2	4

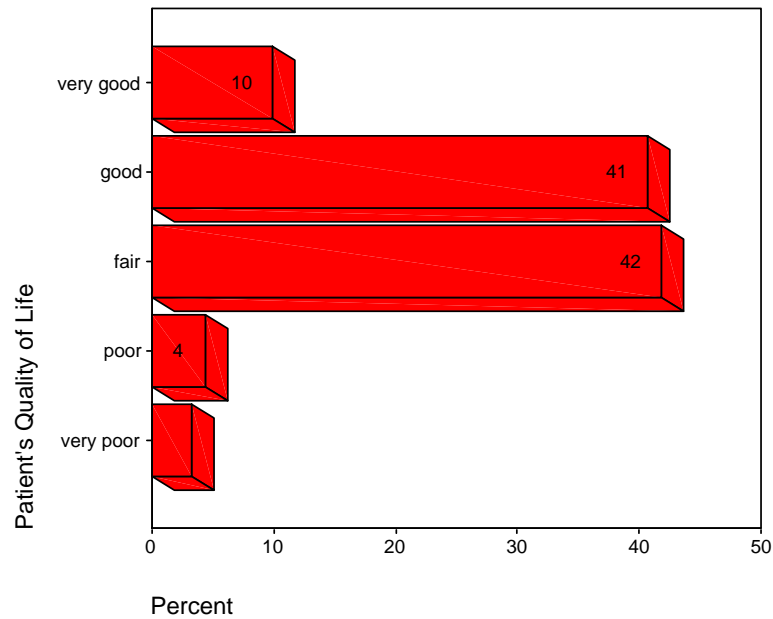
**Figure 3.5 Other Facilities**



### 3.17 Quality of Life.

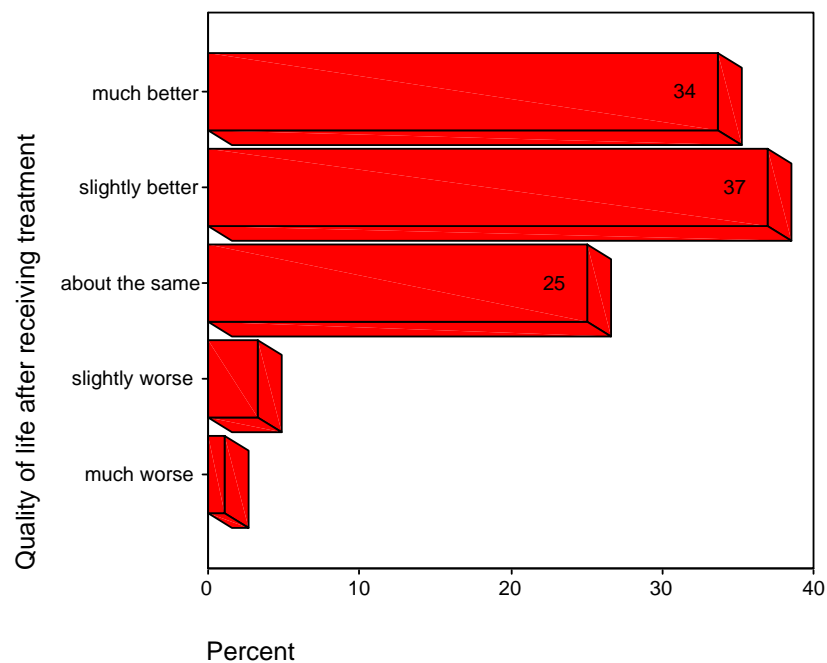
The largest proportion (42%) of patients see their quality of life at present as "fair", with well under half of the patients describing their quality of life as "good" (figure 3.6).

**Figure 3.6 Quality of Life at present**



When patients were asked how they would describe their quality of life after receiving treatment at the community based Physiotherapy centre, one in three (33%) patients reported it to be "much better". The majority (37%) of patients felt their quality of life to be "slightly better" since undergoing treatment at the centres (figure 3.7).

**Figure 3.7 Quality of Life after treatment**



## 4. SURVEY OF GPs

### 4.1 Introduction

Fifteen questionnaires were sent to GPs who were involved in this primary care scheme to elicit the perceived benefits of the scheme. A total of ten questionnaires were returned, giving a 67% response rate.

### 4.2 General medical service patients

The number of general medical service (GMS) patient's seen by different GP's varied from 300 to 1600. The average number of patients per GP was 927. Out of a total of 8,350 GMS patients seen by the ten GPs only 64 (0.7%) have received Physiotherapy treatment since January. One particular GP has 1600 GMS patients and none of these have received Physiotherapy treatment since January.

### 4.3 Patients who were referred to the centre but did not receive treatment.

Most GPs cited 'long waiting lists' as the main reason why patients who were referred to the service could not receive treatment from the Physiotherapist. Other patients were confined to nursing homes and could not avail of the service (table 4.1).

**Table 4.1 Patients referred to the service but could not receive treatment**

Patients who were referred but could not receive treatment	No	%
Patient in nursing home	1	33
Due to long waiting list	2	66

### 4.4 Appropriateness of referrals.

The majority (62%) of patients that were referred to the community centre for treatment by their GP were able to receive treatment. However 37% of GPs stated they referred patients to the service who could not receive treatment. The main reason for not being able to refer patients was due to long waiting times. If patients were unable to receive treatment at the local centre, GPs were forced to send them to alternative Physiotherapy centres.

The vast majority (90%) of GPs referred their patients to a private Physiotherapy practice. The remaining GPs referred patients to Galway City hospitals (Merlin Park and UCHG).

#### **4.5 How patients would cope without the Physiotherapy service.**

Table 4.2 shows that almost half (44%) of GPs felt that if the Physiotherapy service was not available to their patients, they would simply have to do without the treatment, not seeking an alternative service. More than one in five (22%) of GPs reported that their patients would have to 'suffer on' in discomfort without any treatment. The rest of the GP's patients would have to be forced to travel elsewhere for treatment.

**Table 4.2 What patients would do if the Physiotherapy service was not available to them.**

What patients would do if the service was not available	No	%
Suffer on	2	22
Do without it / would not receive Physiotherapy	4	44
Go elsewhere	1	11
Use private service	3	33
Travel to Galway	2	22

#### **4.6 Communication links between GPs and Physiotherapists.**

The majority (60%) of GPs felt that the communication existing between themselves and the community based Physiotherapists was either excellent or good (table 4.3). Only two GPs (20%) felt that there were poor communication links with the Physiotherapists.

**Table 4.3 Communication Links between GPs and Physiotherapists**

Communication links	No	%
Excellent	3	30
Good	3	30
Reasonable	2	20
Poor	2	20
Very Poor	0	0

Multiple response, therefore percentages do not add to 100%

#### **4.7 Satisfaction with Health Centre among GPs.**

Half (50%) of the GPs surveyed were happy with the level of Physiotherapy service provided to their patients. As can be seen in Table 4.4 all GPs stated that 'long waiting lists' was the main reason why they were not satisfied with the Physiotherapy service. A fifth (20%) of GPs were also unhappy with the restricted opening hours at the centres.

**Table 4.4 Why GPs are not satisfied with the service provided to your patients**

Why GPs are not satisfied with the service	No	%
Takes too long to wait for appointments	5	100
Patients require immediate treatment but have to wait	1	20
Opening hours are too restricted	1	20

Multiple response, therefore percentages do not add to 100%

#### **4.8 Benefits GPs have experienced with availability of service.**

All GPs believed that the availability of the community based service had 'significant benefits in terms of improved communication with Physiotherapists' and resulted in 'better feedback in relation to the treatment their patients were receiving'. Three quarters of GPs (75%) felt that patients have benefited from the community based service by availing of easier arrangement of appointments for Physiotherapy treatment (table 4.5). A high proportion (70%) of GPs also believed that the service centre provided patients with easier access to Physiotherapists. Well over half (60%) of GPs reported a decrease in the number of visits from patients who have been referred to the Physiotherapy service.

**Table 4.5 Benefits GPs have experienced with the availability of service for patients.**

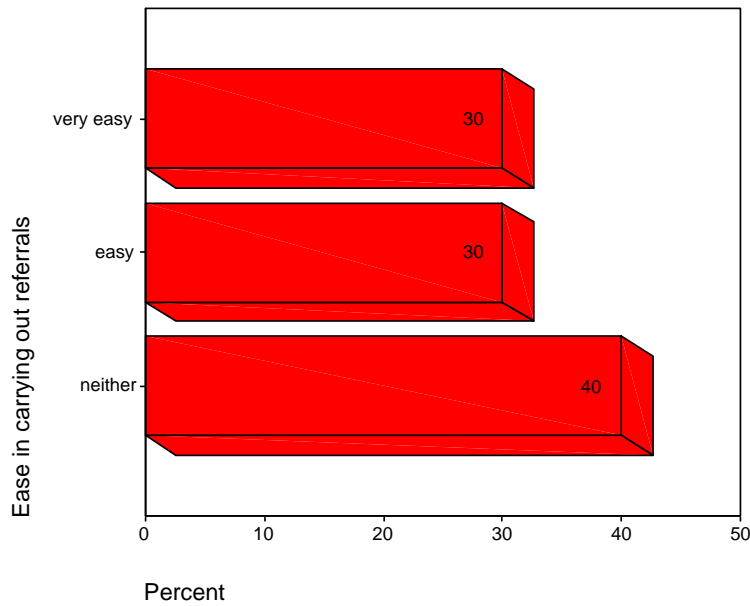
Benefits GPs have experienced with availability of service	No	%
Easier access to Physiotherapist for my patients	7	70
Easier arrangement of appointments	6	75
Improved communication with Physiotherapist	8	100
Feedback in relation to treatment	6	100

Multiple response, therefore percentages do not add to 100%

#### **4.9 The referral process.**

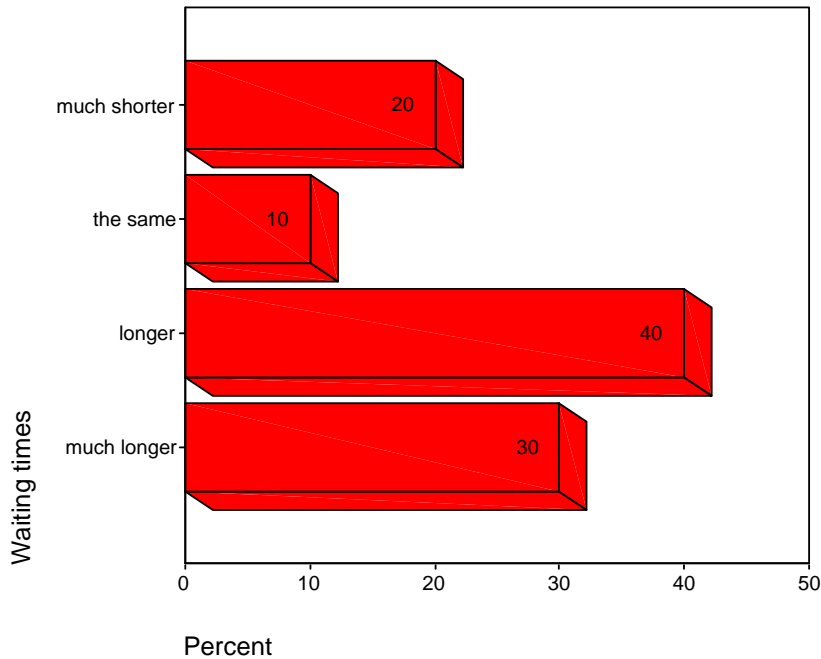
When asked if the referral process for the community based service was easy to use in relation to referring patients to alternative Physiotherapy services. Figure 4.1 shows that most GPs (60%) felt that it was 'very easy' or 'easy', while 40% did not notice any difference (good or bad) between the community based service and alternative services.

**Figure 4.1** *Ease of making referrals*



One in five GPs (20%) surveyed thought that waiting times between referral and first appointments were 'much shorter' through the community based Physiotherapy service compared to alternative services (figure 4.2). However 40% of GPs felt that the waiting times between referral and first appointments were 'longer' when using the community based service.

**Figure 4.2** *Waiting times between referral and first appointments.*



#### **4.10 Suggested improvement.**

As can be seen from Table 4.6 most GPs surveyed argued that 'shorter waiting times' was the most important aspect of the Physiotherapy service which needed to be improved. The GPs also recommended 'extra Physiotherapy service provision' and 'faster access for acute problems' as two other worthwhile changes to the current service.

**Table 4.6 Areas connected with the Physiotherapy service that can be improved.**

Areas for improvement	No	%
Shorter waiting times	3	60
Extra physiotherapist provision	1	20
Faster access for acute problems	1	20

Multiple response, therefore percentages do not add to 100%



## **5. DISCUSSION**

### **5.1 Survey of Patients**

Patients using the scheme have appointments with the Physiotherapist relatively frequently, with the majority having treatment once a week or more often. This demonstrates that a frequent service is provided to those availing of it. However, there does appear to be a significant delay in getting the first appointment with the service, with an average wait of five weeks. This may lead to patients experiencing unnecessary pain and discomfort while waiting for treatment, and some may seek treatment elsewhere (as indicated by GPs). Waiting times for second appointments do not appear to be as significant a problem (average waiting time less than two weeks). This suggests that the service only takes on patients when it has the capacity to give them a treatment programme within an appropriate timeframe for that treatment. Demand appears to exceed the level of service provided, causing a backlog of appointments. There appears to be a clear need to expand the service to cope with existing demand.

Benefits of treatment to patients included pain relief, increased mobility, and decreased level of impairment. Three quarters of patients reported that their physical health was better than when they first started receiving treatment. In addition, 71% believed their quality of life had improved since receiving the treatment. This highlights the considerable benefits Physiotherapy treatment can bring to patients.

The Community Physiotherapy Service does fulfil its role in providing a local accessible service with the majority able to travel to the service in 15 minutes or less. This compares to 45 minutes or more for almost half of the patients if they had to travel to alternative services. The service also appears to be used by people living a long distance from it. This suggests it is providing a service not available in other areas, and that some people are prepared to travel to receive the service.

In terms of the Health Centres where the service is available, it can be seen that the vast majority believe they are excellent or good, with the vast majority satisfied in terms of a range of different criteria. This demonstrates the service currently offered in Tuam and Gort Health Centres.

### **5.2 Survey of GPs**

The GPs who are involved in the service have only used it for 0.7% of their GMS patients since 2001. Whilst not all patients would have a need for such a service, the findings do indicate that the service may be under-utilised. Efforts to increase GP's utilisation of the service should be made, particularly due to the positive feedback from those that have used the service (see section 3).

Over one third of patients that GPs referred to the service were unable to receive treatment, and as such had to be referred to alternative treatment centres. This is despite the overall good communication between GP's and Physiotherapists. Comments from GPs also indicate that patients were re-referred to other services due to long waiting times. This suggests that there is a need to reduce waiting times. In addition, although most GP's are happy with the current referral process, it is also suggested that efforts to minimise inappropriate referrals should be made, as this delays patients' treatment and also wastes their time. Existing referral criteria should be examined to establish if improvements are required.

The Community Physiotherapy Service has given the majority of GPs considerable benefits including better feedback about patients treatment, ease of making appointments, easier access to Physiotherapists, and a decrease in the number of times patients referred to the service, visit their GP. However, it must be noted that, there does appear to be some scope to improve waiting times between referral and first appointment as the majority of GPs believe that this was longer than when using alternative services. It may also indicate that the service may need to be expanded to cope with existing demand.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Community Physiotherapy Service has provided considerable benefits to both GPs and patients. The evaluation does provide justification for its continuation. However, it is recommended that the following issues be addressed to ensure it operates to its full potential:

1. Efforts to increase GP's utilisation of the community Physiotherapy service should be made.
2. There is a need to reduce waiting times to ensure patients are not re-referred to alternative services. Waiting times for the first appointment should be targeted for intervention.
3. Existing referral criteria should be examined to establish if improvements are required.
4. Consideration should be given to expanding the existing service (18 hr/week) to cope with existing demand.

## **6. REFERENCES**

Department of Health Children (2001) Primary Care -A New Direction, Health Strategy.

Herbert et al (2001) Effective Physiotherapy BMJ; 323:788-790.

# APPENDIX 1

## Survey of Patients

Q.1). Please state your age \_\_\_\_\_ years

Q.2) Are you?

Male	1
Female	2

Q.3). In which Health Centre did you receive the community Physiotherapy service?

Tuam	1
Gort	2

Q.4). How often did you receive treatment in the Health Centre Physiotherapy service in \_\_\_\_\_ the last year?

2-3 times a week	1
Once a week	2
Once a fortnight	3
Once a month	4
Once every 3 months	5
Once in 6 months	6
Once a year	7
Don't know	8

Q.5). How long did you have to wait for your first appointment to see the Physiotherapist?

Weeks\_\_\_\_\_ Months\_\_\_\_\_

Q.6) Approximately after your first visit, how long did you have to wait for your next appointment, if needed?

Weeks\_\_\_\_\_ Months\_\_\_\_\_

Q.7). In the last six months were you re-referred to the Physiotherapist for treatment for a \_\_\_\_\_ second complaint than you had?

Yes	1
No	2

Q.8.). In which of the following ways did you find the treatment benefited your condition?

	Yes	No
Pain relief	1	2
Increased Mobility	1	2
Decreased level of Impairment	1	2
Other _____		

Q.9). How would you describe your physical health now compared to when you first started receiving treatment from the community Physiotherapist?

Much better	1
Slightly better	2
About the same	3
Slightly worse	4
Much worse	5

Q.10). Did the Physiotherapist explain to you why you were receiving this treatment for your condition?

Yes	1
No	2

Q.11). Is there any part of the Health Centre Physiotherapy service you feel can be improved?

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Q.12). Are there any other Physiotherapy facilities you would like to use when receiving treatment in the community Health Centre?

Yes	1
No	2

**If yes, what facilities would you like to use?**

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Q.13). Do you suffer any health problems, which make it difficult for you to get out of the house to your Physiotherapy appointments by yourself?  
E.g. mobility, breathing

Yes	1
No	2

**If yes, please state what:**

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Q.14). Approximately how long does it take to go from your house to the Health Centre?

\_\_\_\_\_Minutes\_\_\_\_\_Hours

Q.15). Approximately what distance do you travel to the Health Centre?

\_\_\_\_\_Miles

Q.16). What is the main mode of transport you usually use to travel to the Health Centre?

Bus	1
Taxi	2
Car (driver)	3
Car (passenger)	4
Walk	5
Other	_____

Q.17). What would you do if this local Physiotherapy service were not available to you?

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Q.18). Based on your last visit, please indicate your overall level of satisfaction with the following elements of the Health Centre/Physiotherapy service.

(1= very satisfied; 5= very dissatisfied)

	Very satisfied				Very dissatisfied
Ease of getting an appointment to see a physio	1	2	3	4	5
Length of time spent waiting for physio at each session	1	2	3	4	5
Length of time spent with physio at each session	1	2	3	4	5
Waiting facilities at clinic	1	2	3	4	5
Availability of a seat in the waiting room	1	2	3	4	5
Opening hours of clinic	1	2	3	4	5
General manner of the physio	1	2	3	4	5
General manner of staff	1	2	3	4	5

Q.19). What is your overall opinion of the primary care Health Centre?

Excellent	1
Good	2
Reasonable	3
Poor	4
Very poor	5

Q.20). Have you ever had to use another facility for Physiotherapy treatment?

Yes	1
No	2

Q.21). What was the last other facility that you used?

UCHG	1
Merlin Park Hospital	2
Portiuncula Hospital	3
Private Physiotherapy practice	4
Rehabilitation Clinic	5
Other _____	

Q.22). How long approximately did it take you to go to the other facility?

\_\_\_\_\_Minutes\_\_\_\_\_Hours

Q.23). What distance approximately was the other facility from your home?

\_\_\_\_\_Miles

Q.24). How would you categorise your quality of life at present?

Very Good	1
Good	2
Fair	3
Poor	4
Very Poor	5

Q.25). How would you describe your quality of life now compared with since you started receiving treatment?

Much Better	1
Slightly Better	2
About the same	3
Slightly worse	4
Much worse	5

## **APPENDIX 2**

### Survey of GPs

Number of general medical service patient's \_\_\_\_\_

Q.1). Where is your medical practice located?

Tuam	1
Gort	2

Q.2). How long have you been referring patients to the community Physiotherapist?  
 Months \_\_\_\_\_ Years \_\_\_\_\_

Q.3). How many of your patients have received Physiotherapy treatment since January?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Q.4). Were there patients referred to the service but could not receive treatment from the Physiotherapist?

Yes	1
No	2

**If yes, please state why:**

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Q.5). Where would you send your patients for treatment, if this service was not available to them in the local Health Centres?

UCHG	1
Merlin Park hospital	2
Portiuncula hospital	3
Private Physiotherapy practice	4
Rehabilitation clinic	5
Other _____	

Q.6). In your opinion what would the patients do if this service were not available to them?

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Q.7). What is your opinion of the communication between yourself and the Physiotherapist who treats your patients?

Excellent	1
Good	2
Reasonable	3
Poor	4
Very poor	5

Q.8). Are you satisfied with how the Physiotherapist service is provided to your patients?

Yes	1
No	2

**If no, why are you not satisfied with the service?**

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Q.9). What benefits if any have you experienced due to the availability of this service for your patients?

	Yes	No
Easier access to Physiotherapist for my patients	1	2
Easier arrangement of appointments	1	2
Improved communication with Physiotherapist	1	2
Feedback in relation to treatment	1	2
Other _____		

Q.10). Since your patients have been referred to the Physiotherapy service do they come to see you more or less often?

More often	1
The same	2
Less often	3
Don't know	4

Q.11). Is the referral process easier to use in relation to the community Physiotherapist than referring patients to alternative Physiotherapy services?

Very easy	1
Easy	2
Neither	3
Difficult	4
Very difficult	5

Q.12). Are waiting times between referral and first appointments shorter, the same, or longer through the community Physiotherapy service compared to alternative services?

Much shorter	1
Shorter	2
The same	3
Longer	4
Much longer	5

Q.13). Are there any areas connected with this service that you believe can be improved and will benefit everybody concerned?

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