UNIVERSITY OF MALTA

Institute of Health Care

Dissertation

A NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR TRAINING PHYSIOTHERAPISTS IN FIELDWORK SUPERVISION

By

Shawn Meilak

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science in Health Services Management

May 2009
Declaration of Authenticity

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own research under the constant supervision of Dr. Paul Bezzina. I declare that the information contained herein is true, correct and accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Shawn Meilak
Supervisor

Dr. Paul Bezzina
Supervisor
Dedicated to my late father Alfred who, despite passing away in my first year of studies, during his sufferings gave me the most important lesson in life to never give up even though the difficulties and tribulations may seem insurmountable.....
Acknowledgements

First of all I would like to show my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Paul Bezzina, for his useful guidance, constructive criticism and valuable suggestions. Without his constant support, this work would not have been possible.

I would also like to thank the Director of Institute of Health Care and HSM Course Co-ordinator, Dr Sandra Buttigieg, together with my advisor, Mr Michael Bezzina for giving me practical recommendations and advice when needed.

My sincere gratitude also goes to my colleagues at work, who offered me advice, support and new perspectives on each element of my study whilst understanding the busy moments I was going through.

Credit is also due to my family and friends for their continuous patience, support and encouragement during the whole of my studies. Special thanks go to my late father Alfred for helping me always to believe in myself. His support, kindness, sense of humour and fatherhood meant so much to me.

Special thanks go to my wife Maria for being by my side throughout the whole course of studies and urging me on. If I wrote down everything I ever wanted in a wife and best friend I would not have believed I could meet someone better.

Finally, I would like to thank all the participants of this study, without whom this study would never have been possible.
Executive Summary

Currently within the Physiotherapy profession in Malta, physiotherapists who provide student supervision are not being provided with any training in fieldwork supervision. Consequently, lack of experience and absence of training frequently leaves the fieldwork supervisor searching for direction. Thus the aim of this study was to determine whether Maltese physiotherapists acknowledge the need for training in student supervision. In order to reach this aim, the current practices and the attitudes of the people involved in the process of fieldwork supervision were obtained and where possible compared with the international scene.

Qualitative data was collected via one-to-one interviews with 12 physiotherapists, 3 members of the Physiotherapy Management together with 2 members of the Education Institution. Additionally, two focus groups were carried out with the 10 students in their final year of studies who accepted to take part in this study.

Results showed that the majority of respondents felt that fieldwork supervision may increase workloads and can be perceived as a burden. However, there was a common interest of improving this work practice. The most important needs that came out of this study were the needs for training in fieldwork supervision together with a framework whereby clear guidelines can be set. Trained fieldwork supervisors, apart from increasing the quality of fieldwork supervision, may also help the management to allocate workloads properly. Since fieldwork supervisors are also required to assess students at the end of their clinical placements better communication between the main stakeholders involved in the process of fieldwork supervision was also considered essential.

There are a number of issues arising from the findings in this study that provide important recommendations to management. The issue of lack of communication between the clinicians and the Education Institution is an area which needs to be
addressed in order to enhance teamwork leading to benefits to the whole profession. When these two entities are in harmony it will be easier to develop clear guidelines on what is expected in the clinical field including objectives and standards whilst grading students. On their part Physiotherapy Managers should promote a culture of support for practice-based learning within their departments and involve the whole team in the process.

Finally, all respondents perceived that training in fieldwork supervision is a necessity. It is essential therefore that the management invests in training fieldwork supervisors thus contributing to a better future workforce within the Physiotherapy profession in Malta.
Contents

Acknowledgements ................................................................. i
Executive Summary .............................................................. ii
Contents .................................................................................... iv
List of Tables .............................................................................. vii
List of Figures .............................................................................. viii
List of Appendices .................................................................... ix

Chapter 1 Introduction ................................................................ 1

1.1 Introduction .......................................................................... 2
1.2 Selection of topic: why it was chosen ..................................... 2
1.3 Fieldwork Supervision in Malta ............................................. 3
1.4 Fieldwork Supervision in the Physiotherapy Profession in Malta 4
1.5 Purpose and Benefits of this Study ........................................ 5
1.6 Management Issues ............................................................. 5
1.7 Conclusion .............................................................................. 6

Chapter 2 Literature Review ......................................................... 8

2.1 Introduction .......................................................................... 9
2.2 Definition of Fieldwork and Supervision ............................... 9
2.3 Models of Fieldwork Supervision ......................................... 10
2.4 The Stakeholders of Fieldwork Supervision .......................... 12
2.5 The Role of Fieldwork Supervisors and Students .................. 12
2.6 Skills Required to Act as Fieldwork Supervisors ................. 15
2.7 Reflective Practice in the Process of Fieldwork Supervision .... 17
2.8 Teaching safe practices ....................................................... 18
2.9 Transition from the Classroom to the Clinic ....................... 20
2.10 Is Training in Fieldwork Supervision Required? .................. 21
2.11 Fieldwork Supervision Training Done Worldwide ................ 22
2.12 Advantages of Being a Fieldwork Supervisor .................... 23
2.13 Disadvantages of Being a Fieldwork Supervisor ................ 25
2.13.1 The Time Factor ......................................................... 26
2.13.2 Remuneration for Supervisors ........................................ 28
2.14 Conclusion ........................................................................ 29

Chapter 3 Methods .................................................................. 30

3.1 Introduction ........................................................................ 31
3.2 Research Topic .................................................................... 31
3.3 Operational Definition .......................................................... 32
3.4 The Research Design ............................................................. 32
3.4.1 Philosophical Underpinnings of Phenomenology .............. 33
3.5 Inclusion Criteria and Sampling ........................................... 34
3.6 Data Collection .................................................................... 35
3.6.1 Interviews ........................................................................ 36
3.6.2 Focus Groups ................................................................. 38
3.6.3 Audiotaping and Transcribing .......................................... 38
3.6.4 Reflective Diary .............................................................. 40
3.6.5 Review of Available Literature ......................................... 40
3.7 Rigour ................................................................................. 41
3.7.1 Credibility ....................................................................... 41
3.7.2 Transferability ................................................................. 42
3.7.3 Confirmability ................................................................. 43
3.7.4 Auditability ...................................................................... 43
3.8 Ethical Considerations ............................................................ 44
3.8.1 Approval to Carry Out the Study ....................................... 44
3.8.2 Informed Consent ............................................................ 44
3.8.3 Anonymity and Confidentiality ........................................ 44
3.9 The Process of Data Analysis and Interpretation .................. 45
3.10 Conclusion ........................................................................ 47

Chapter 4 Results .................................................................... 48

4.1 Introduction ......................................................................... 49
4.2 Figures showing the Emergence of the Main Themes of this Study ......................................................... 49
4.3 Grouping up of Themes ........................................................ 60
4.4 Conclusion ........................................................................... 61

Chapter 5 Analysis and Discussion of Results ......................... 62

5.1 Introduction ......................................................................... 63
# List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Table Number</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2</td>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Table 2.1 Advantages of being a fieldwork supervisor</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
<td>Methods</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Table 3.1 Coding of transcribed interviews and focus groups</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
<td>Results</td>
<td></td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Table 4.1 Master list of themes and sub-themes</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
<td>Analysis and Discussion of Results</td>
<td></td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Table 5.1 Advantages of fieldwork supervision</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 4</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Figure 4.1</th>
<th>Definition of Fieldwork Supervision</th>
<th>48</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Figure 4.2</td>
<td>The Role of the Fieldwork Supervisor</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Figure 4.3</td>
<td>Skills needed by Physiotherapists acting as Fieldwork Supervisors</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Figure 4.4</td>
<td>Advantages of Fieldwork Supervision</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Figure 4.5</td>
<td>Disadvantages of Fieldwork Supervision</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Figure 4.6</td>
<td>Elements that make up a Positive Fieldwork placement</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Figure 4.7</td>
<td>Elements that make up a Negative Fieldwork placement</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Figure 4.8</td>
<td>Needs in the area of Fieldwork Supervision</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Figure 4.9</td>
<td>Main subjects to be included in Training</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Figure 4.10</td>
<td>Direct questions asked to participants</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# List of Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1</td>
<td>Main Studies Reviewed</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2</td>
<td>Interview Guide Questions</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A: Physiotherapists acting as supervisors</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B: Managerial level in Physiotherapy</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C: Education Institution</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D: Focus Group discussion with students</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 3</td>
<td>Information Letters and Consent Forms</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 4</td>
<td>Ethics Board Approval Form</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 5</td>
<td>Letters of Approval</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 6</td>
<td>Supervisor Acceptance to Supervise the Study</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of the fieldwork experience is mainly to provide students with the opportunity to integrate academic knowledge with application skills at progressively higher levels of performance and responsibility (Higgs & McAllister, 2005). By helping the students to test directly the theories and facts learned in academic study and refine their skills through interaction with patients under supervision of qualified physiotherapists, the management is ensuring the development of new members of staff who can act as competent practitioners immediately on graduation (Crosbie et al. 2002). This introductory chapter will identify the rationale of the study together with its relevance to the organization it studies since currently a structure of student supervision within the Physiotherapy profession in Malta is lacking. Additionally the study shall seek to portray how this issue is of relevance to the field of Health Services Management.

1.2 Selection of Topic: why it was chosen

The current health care climate in Malta is characterised by a gradual shift of health resources towards more community-based prevention and early intervention. Despite this fact, student supervision within the healthcare field is being undertaken within hospitals or other facilities. With the migration to a new acute hospital¹ student supervision is challenged by the need to treat acute cases² prior to admission to rehabilitation facilities. This suggests that new ways will have to be set up to enable physiotherapy students to develop competence within the realities of new work environments. From a physiotherapist perspective it may be difficult to teach students the professional skills and knowledge in such a changing environment due to lack of guidelines and training. Additionally, Ohman, Hagg & Dahlgren (2005) stated that

¹ Mater Dei Hospital opened its doors to the public for the first time on 29 June 2007
² Cases requiring a short stay at hospital
there is a need to include clinical physiotherapists into continuous education in evidence-based practice, in order to ensure that what is taught to students is relevant. Thus continuous professional development within the area of acute Physiotherapy care and student supervision will ensure competent teaching strategies and proficient Physiotherapy students. It will also be easier for the employer to assign the students to physiotherapists who are considered as competent in the field.

Within this practice framework, supervisors are challenged to deal with the difference between what is taught in the academic setting and what is practiced in the clinical setting. Ohman et al. (2005) established that supervisors saw themselves as being in the centre of two competing and changing fields namely the academic setting and the clinic in the healthcare organisation. This further highlights the need for physiotherapists to involve themselves in the process of continuous education to be able to meet the demands of fieldwork education. In so doing they will be increasing their work satisfaction as well as the quality of Physiotherapy education (Ohman et al. 2005).

1.3 Fieldwork Supervision in Malta

When performing a review of the literature, none was found regarding fieldwork education within the Physiotherapy profession in Malta. Furthermore when discussing this issue with other physiotherapists a considerable high number expressed their concern about the present fieldwork supervision carried out, stating that they are not trained and that the undergraduate course did not prepare them to be able to act as fieldwork supervisors. In a study conducted by Bonello (1998) within the Occupational Therapy profession in Malta, it was evident that the lack of formal education for therapists to prepare them for their role as fieldwork supervisors, was a constant concern for participants. Moreover the same study also established that the quality of supervision was considered to be generally inappropriate and was perceived as an inhibiting influence to participants' learning.
In Malta different health professions are in the process of striving to collect operational definitions or terms of reference from the participating divisions within the Institute of Healthcare at the University of Malta, in order to build a framework and establish a common definition of the role and responsibilities of the fieldwork supervisor. However an agreement between the various professions has not been reached. Yet these professions regard fieldwork education as an important part of their curriculum. For example the nursing profession consider the persons taking care of students on the clinical field as ‘Mentors’ whilst the Occupational Therapy division refers to them as ‘Fieldwork Educators’. The Physiotherapy Division and the Radiography Division consider them as ‘Clinical Supervisors’. This study seeks to achieve a better understanding of the perceptions of Maltese physiotherapists with regard to further education in fieldwork supervision. The term ‘fieldwork supervisor’ will be used in this study.

1.4 Fieldwork Supervision in the Physiotherapy Profession in Malta

The Physiotherapy course in Malta is built on eight semesters, the last two being entirely clinical. However, towards the end of the second and fourth semester, there is a four week clinical placement (Clinical Handbook, 2008). This shows that fieldwork education encompasses a substantial part of the Physiotherapy curriculum. More often than not, within the Physiotherapy profession in Malta, the process of becoming an effective fieldwork supervisor is an evolutionary one based on trial and error. This is due to the fact that physiotherapists who provide student supervision are not being provided with any training in fieldwork supervision. At present official appointment of fieldwork supervisors is lacking within the Physiotherapy profession in Malta and those acting as fieldwork supervisors are not provided with any guidelines on what is expected of them. Yet Senior and Assistant Principal physiotherapists are still expected to have students assigned to them and to assess their performance during their clinical placements. Additionally the situation is

3 Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Nursing, Podiatry and Radiography
4 The terms ‘clinical supervisors’, ‘student supervisors’, ‘clinical educators’ and ‘fieldwork educators’ are used interchangeably in the literature.
exacerbated by the lack of structure of fieldwork placements whereby a student is not assigned to a particular therapist for a whole fieldwork placement. This situation could create problems as students may not be given proper feedback on their performance and continuity of care might be limited.

1.5 Purpose and Benefits of this Study

The aim of this study is to determine whether Maltese physiotherapists acknowledge the need for training in student supervision. This will be accompanied by the following objectives of the study:

- To identify the current practice in dealing with students’ clinical education.
- To determine whether the present practice is meeting the students’ needs and the needs of the profession.
- To identify the perceptions of Physiotherapy students, physiotherapists acting as supervisors and key people of the Education Institution towards fieldwork supervision.
- To determine the development process of fieldwork education within Physiotherapy and how this compares with the international scene.

By fulfilling the above aim and objectives this study may lead to various issues especially management issues that can be used for the future improvement of fieldwork supervision as well as the improvement of the Physiotherapy service in Malta in general.

1.6 Management Issues

- Quality assurance of future physiotherapists

Whilst improving the quality of fieldwork supervision the management will be increasing the quality of novice physiotherapists thus investing in the future workforce. By identifying and meeting the needs of students, physiotherapists acting
as fieldwork supervisors, the Education Institution and the Physiotherapy Managers, the current practices are improved, which in turn should increase patient satisfaction. This reflects well on both the management and the whole Physiotherapy Department.

- **Policies regarding Standards of Practice**
The formulation and implementation of policies regarding standards of practice for physiotherapists acting as fieldwork supervisors is beneficial both to the profession as well as to the clinician. Practice frameworks can be highlighted and the management can monitor what is current practice. It will also be easier for the physiotherapists involved in fieldwork supervision to follow what is expected of them.

- **Evidence-based practice aided by lifelong learning**
The promotion of lifelong learning as a tool for the acquisition of skills required to become fieldwork supervisors is becoming more and more crucial in the current healthcare field. Clinicians should help students in developing good practical skills by incorporating what they have learnt in class with current practice. Through lifelong learning the clinicians will be able to teach students evidence-based practices. By incorporating the best research evidence together with their expertise, clinicians acting as supervisors will ensure that students are learning safe practices.

- **Clinical Reasoning Skills**
Professional judgement and decision making requires reflective practice and excellent skills in clinical reasoning. Clinical reasoning enables the clinician to take the best judged action in a specific context. Thus, the provision of clinical placements where clinical reasoning skills are practiced and sheltered ensures that students gain authentic fieldwork experiences which will endow their future practice.
1.7 Conclusion

Although this research will be particular to the Maltese context, this study will commence by examining some of the key fieldwork issues from a global perspective. This is followed by describing the methods used in this study and finally presenting and discussing the results in order to provide a few recommendations for management.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW
Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Following a review of the available literature this chapter shall seek to outline the main definitions of fieldwork supervision with particular reference to the main persons involved in the process of fieldwork supervision. The process is augmented by defining the roles of fieldwork supervisors, and the skills which the fieldwork supervisor requires. I shall also draw attention to the transition from the classroom to the clinic. The chapter also highlights the main advantages and disadvantages of being a fieldwork supervisor.

2.2 Definition of Fieldwork and Supervision

Some of the literature reviewed clearly divided fieldwork and supervision into two distinct and separate issues. For instance, Cohn (as cited in Willard, Hopkins, Spackman & Smith, 1993) stated that fieldwork provides students with situations in which to practice interpersonal skills with patients and staff and to develop characteristics essential to productive working relationships. In a later study regarding fieldwork in Occupational Therapy, Thomas, Penman and Williamson (2004) defined 'fieldwork' as "a core element of occupational therapy education, being the place where students integrate theory and practice, along with providing opportunities to develop the graduates' concept of their future roles and the potentials of the practice of occupational therapy" (Thomas et al., 2004, p.1). Coates and Crist (2004) stated that the essential goal of fieldwork is professional development of students leading to entry-level practice abilities.

In contrast to the above definition of fieldwork by Thomas et al. (2004), which focused more on the location where fieldwork supervision takes place, Cohn and Frum (1988) focused more on the teaching aspect. They argued that supervision is enclosed in a lot of definitions as a dynamic teaching-learning experience, an
education process that serves as a bridge between previously learned knowledge and clinical skill, and a mechanism that ensures an experiential learning environment. According to Williams, French and Higgs (2005), supervision is a means of generating learning by enhancing practice through self-evaluation and development. Casares, Bradley, Jaffe and Lee (2003) used the concepts of fieldwork and supervision and stated that fieldwork supervision is an opportunity to refine skills through client interaction under the supervision of qualified personnel. Hence in so doing the fieldwork experience gives students the opportunity to test theories and facts learned in academic study.

Although there are areas of agreement on what fieldwork and supervision stand for, there are a number of ways of putting this into practice. Various authors such as Aiken, Menaker and Barsky, (2001) and Strohschein, Hagler & May, (2002) have suggested that a range of models of fieldwork supervision is necessary rather than one fixed framework. This echoes the view that there is no one model of supervision that will suit the needs of clinical situations within the physiotherapy profession.

2.3 Models of Fieldwork Supervision

Usually, models of fieldwork supervision are based on the principle of a single educator working face-to-face with one, or a small number of students, instructing them in the management of a wide range of health conditions (Lekkas et al. 2007). The restrictive nature (one-to-one supervision) of what clinical education encompasses is evidenced by the stance adopted by governing bodies such as the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists (CSP 2002, p 29) who assert that “students should spend the maximum time possible during periods of practice-based learning in direct contact with patients”. This traditional model, however, is not the only model currently in use. Staff in the Occupational Therapy service at Sunnybrook and Women’s College Health Sciences Centre outlined innovative models of clinical fieldwork education as an alternative to the traditional one-to-one supervision model.

---

1 ‘practice-based learning’ is used in preference to clinical education within the CSP framework
Aiken et al. (2001) defined alternative models of fieldwork education as those derived from problem-based learning, a new approach that places a strong emphasis on self-directed learning. Bar-On (2001) stressed that these innovative apprenticeship models place the responsibility for integrating class and field learning as the responsibility of the student. On the other hand, Aiken et al. (2001) maintained that the one-to-one preceptorship model of fieldwork supervision provides the student with role modelling, promotion of professional socialization, fostering the development of confidence and competence, enhancement of the ability to apply theory to practice, and development of clinical skills. Notwithstanding these important aspects of one-to-one supervision, Aiken et al. (2001) sustained that this traditional model of fieldwork supervision may cause entry-level graduates to have unrealistic expectations of close mentorship in the work setting.

Strohschein et al. (2002), whilst studying 10 different clinical education models such as the coaching model and interdisciplinary model, argued that there are many excellent clinical educators and positive clinical education experiences, but stated that this may be due more to clinicians' intuition and natural abilities as educators than to their effective, consistent approach to the clinical education process. Lekkas et al. (2007) added that there is no gold standard model of fieldwork supervision and the planning and preparation of clinical education is perceived as critical, irrespective of the model of education or supervision employed. Lekkas et al. (2007) maintained that well-developed fieldwork education programs are essential components of a professional training program, as they are an important determinant of the quality of health care to be received in the future.

Manias & Aitken (2005) stated that trial and error was the main strategy used by novice teachers as they struggled to make sense of the complex responsibility of developing students' abilities within the clinical setting. In comparison, expert teachers in the same study accessed past experiences as students and as nurses that were meaningful to them in thinking about and using effective teaching practices. However, it is imperative to question if the use of a trial and error method within the
Physiotherapy profession determines better learning fieldwork experience for physiotherapy students.

2.4 The Stakeholders of Fieldwork Supervision

Cohn and Frum (1988) studying the Occupational Therapy profession highlighted that within the framework of fieldwork supervision, the supervisor is a facilitator of learning who serves as a reflective model to be emulated as the students progress toward greater responsibility in their role as occupational therapists. In a study carried out by Ohman et al. (2005) within the Physiotherapy profession in Sweden, the authors stated that supervisors are physiotherapists working in the clinical setting. Since supervision is regarded as part of their ordinary job tasks, they are not paid extra for taking on the responsibility to educate students in the clinic. In Malta according to the Clinical Handbook published by the University of Malta in 2008, fieldwork supervision is undertaken by physiotherapists recommended by the Institute of Health Care (IHC) and approved by the Manager of Physiotherapy services. This Clinical Handbook (2008, p. 4) states that “student learning on clinical placement centres on using patient care as a basis for extending knowledge and competences. This is a process which involves patients, students, clinical supervisors, other professional staff and clinical link tutors”. This shows that in order for fieldwork supervision to take place all the mentioned contributors must take part in the process and not just the physiotherapist acting as a fieldwork supervisor.

2.5 The Role of Fieldwork Supervisors and Students

Way back in 1988, Cohn & Frum stated that fieldwork supervisors assist in the development of clinical reasoning skills which are essential in taking the best judged action in a specific context. More recently Baxter (2007) stated that the objectives of fieldwork supervision are numerous and extend from ensuring patient safety, improving the students’ ability to provide patient care, promoting the advancement of the physiotherapy profession through role-modelling and giving students the
opportunity to explore clinical situations. Additionally, fieldwork supervisors help in providing opportunities for students to increase and improve their clinical skills, familiarising the student to the clinical setting, developing relationships with experienced practitioners, and to ultimately promote the transfer of knowledge from the classroom into the clinical environment.

In their study on the occupational therapy profession, Vogel, Grice, Hill & Moody (2004), agreed that the supervisor serves many roles during fieldwork education, such as mentor, role model and evaluator. Although in this study, the expectations of both the supervisors and the students were similar it was evident that as the educational requirements for occupational therapy students increase, so does the expectations of students to take on expanded responsibilities during fieldwork education (Appendix 1). Sharif and Masoumi (2005) who studied Nursing students' experiences of clinical practice stated that the roles of fieldwork supervisors are not always definite. In this study the majority of students perceived that the fieldwork supervisors had a more evaluative role rather than a teaching role.

Wessel and Larin (2006) examined the perceptions of students on the role of fieldwork supervisors through a qualitative approach over two consecutive summer clinical placements. They described the changes in the reflections of a group of Physiotherapy students from their first to their third clinical placements. The study determined that in the later placement, students were more confident and more focused on the client compared with their first placement. Students broadened their perception of the roles and responsibilities of physiotherapists and of the ultimate impact of their interventions on the patient. The authors concluded that above all fieldwork supervisors have an important role in preparing the students to become reflective practitioners.

Le Maistre, Boudreau, & Pare (2006) argued that supervisors may deliver direct instruction, but they always perform a supportive role as the students move in from

---

2 Appendix 1, Page 117.
the periphery to the centre of the action. They defined good supervisors as those who constantly assess development and create opportunities for growth. In conjunction with this concept, Ogbu (2008) established that the placement of radiography students with staff, assisted students’ learning through effective and committed clinical supervision and constructive feedback. While good supervision was an important component of the students’ clinical education experience, the provision of constructive feedback must have raised the awareness of supervisors and students to important areas that required special attention, that is, refining, and modifying their behaviour and achieving competency.

Reid and McKay (2001) cross-examined 100 out of a population of 119 fieldwork educators who had supervised Glasgow Caledonian University Occupational Therapy students by the use of self-administered questionnaires. The study concluded that fieldwork educators should review their own skills and be able to evaluate their use of self as a professional role model for students.

The impact of the student-supervisor relationship on student learning and student professional development is largely responsible for the quality of supervision that the students receive. MacKenzie, Zakrzewski, Walker, & McCluskey, (2001) describing the workshop carried out in New South Wales for Occupational Therapy supervisors maintained that it was considered essential to enable fieldwork supervisors to build effective relationships with students. This could be achieved by the inclusion of information about student and supervisor learning styles, how to give constructive feedback and how to negotiate roles and learning activities between the supervisor and the student, within the workshop. Buttery, Richter & Filho (2005) also stated that to a lesser extent, the supervisor has to promote close interaction with other academics in order to limit as much as possible the gap which exists between theory and practice.

Similarly, students must be active participants in the fieldwork education process by identifying their own learning styles and goals, collaborating with their supervisor in
developing strategies to meet their needs, and providing feedback to their supervisors to ensure their fieldwork experience has the best potential for success (Gaiptman & Anthony as cited in Vogel et al. 2004). Additionally Cara (as cited in Vogel et al. 2004, p.2) stated that students “assume patient caseloads, use appropriate assessments and treatment interventions, communicate and document information correctly, and practice interpersonal skills with patients and healthcare staff to develop characteristics of a professional”.

2.6 Skills Required to Act as Fieldwork Supervisors

Higgs & Mcallister (2007) stated that early fieldwork education literature emphasized the characteristics of clinical educators namely approachability, role modelling, and fostering student participation. Subsequently, the same authors maintained that the focus shifted to the roles of fieldwork and workplace educators as facilitators of adult learning, emphasizing respect for learners and their experience and the importance of commencing with the learner’s present understanding. Within the same framework, Edwards & Baptiste, cited by MacKenzie et al. (2001, p.3), highlighted the skills involved in being a clinical teacher, as the “established clinical skills, knowledge and understanding of theories and concepts which inform practice, interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills and clinical judgement”. Additionally, Christie et al. cited in MacKenzie et al. (2001, p.3), suggested that in order to be prepared to oversee students, supervisors also need “organizational skills, the ability to give appropriate feedback and offer support, effective communication skills, the ability to develop sound working relationships, and the ability to maintain a positive learning environment”. This is congruent with the results of the study by Cross, (cited in Whitcombe, 2001) where both students and supervisors tended to rate clinical competence, good communication skills, approachability and a good role model as indicators of a good educator. This is essential in facilitating the educational process where the students are given professional, reliable and more accessible clinical guidance.
Strohshein et al. (2002) stated that new generations of fieldwork supervisors require an educational foundation that is reinforced with attitudes and skills that will enable them to build their profession as well as their own professional practice. They suggested that these attitudes and skills include “the desire to engage in lifelong learning and professional growth and an ability to identify and critically evaluate their own practice and the underlying theories and perceptions that inform the practice of physical therapy” (Strohshein et al. 2002, p.161). The authors argued that the management should focus on clinical education in order to provide excellence both in clinical education and subsequently in professional practice.

The study by Turnock, Moran, Scammell, Mallek, & Mulholland (2005) represented the first phase of a three-year project aiming to enhance the role of practice educators. A questionnaire, a focus group and secondary data were used to collect data that informed case studies for five selected disciplines namely Dietetics, Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy and Radiography. The authors argued that for effective practice learning three important pre-requisites are essential. Firstly, practice educators should have the knowledge and skills to coach learners through practice based learning experiences, where there is sharing of knowledge. Secondly, in order to integrate theory and practice, practice educators need knowledge in promoting reflective learning, have ability and authority to facilitate the time and place for the learner to record their learning, and have insight into the curriculum that forms the basis of students’ knowledge. Finally they also stated that practice educators who are in an obvious position of power vis à vis the learner need to be aware of their own performance as role models, but should also be sensitive to their influence on the professional socialization of the learner. Being a longitudinal study where only the first phase was carried out the results of this study were not meant to be conclusive since the aim of the second phase of this study would be to involve the development and dissemination of existing innovations that were considered by the project team as being central to the role of the practice educator.

3 In this study refers to practitioners who supervise students on practice placements
2.7 Reflective Practice in the Process of Fieldwork Supervision

Clouder (2000, p212) defined reflective practice as "the critical analysis of everyday working practices in order to improve competence and promote professional development". Besides being a source of continuous education, fieldwork supervision also promotes reflective practice in physiotherapists. Holyoake (2000) stated that the reflective process of supervision is important to examine the routine of everyday practice thus being a method for improving practice. Lunt, Bracher and Borrill (1996) pointed out that: "supervisors work with students at the same time as developing their own skills". Dix & Hughes (2004) also agreed the concept of reflective practice enables fieldwork supervisors to understand and learn through lived experiences and, as a consequence, take congruent action towards developing increasing effectiveness, within the context of what is understood as desirable practice.

Redmond (2006), stated that one main outcome of reflective practice is personal and professional development. Professional development refers to skills and knowledge attained for both personal development and career advancement (Schon, as cited in Redmond, 2006). Reid & McKay (2001) dealt with this issue by trying to identify strategies used by Occupational Therapy fieldwork educators to evaluate their own supervisory skills. All respondents stated that they encouraged the students they supervised to use self-evaluation strategies while 88.1% stated that they used self-evaluation strategies to assess their own skills as a fieldwork educator. However, despite being valid for the population under study, such a study should be replicated with a larger sample from a cross-section of universities in order to have better statistical results. Additionally, according to the authors, while overall the respondents were found to view self-evaluation positively, only 55.2% of them appeared to understand this concept fully (Appendix 1).

---

4 Term used in this study to refer to fieldwork supervisor
5 Glasgow Caledonian University fieldwork educators
Reflective practice is an issue which also concerns the students involved in fieldwork supervision (Clouder, 2000; Ehrenberg & Haggblom, 2007). During a workshop discussion, Clouder (2000) stated that some students questioned the appropriateness of being challenged by their educators during treatment sessions, suggesting that this was stressful for them and thus undermined their relationship with the patient. In contrast, other students in the same study concluded that reflective practice during fieldwork was deemed useful and should be recognized as a way of encouraging reflection-in-action. The latter corresponds with the findings by Ehrenberg et al. (2007). They described the experiences of nursing students and their preceptors of problem-based learning and a new model for supervision in clinical education. In this study the possibility of reflection was perceived as being important by both the students and the preceptors although it sometimes was difficult for preceptors to set aside time (Appendix 1).

2.8 Teaching Safe Practices

Chipchase, Dalton, Williams and Scutter (2004) stated that in order to be able to teach safe practices according to management standards, what is taught needs to be evidence-based. With respect to evidence-based practice in education, perhaps the best definition, is that amended by Chipchase et al. (2004, p.133) which states that “evidence-based practice in education is the integration of best research evidence with educator’s expertise and student values”. Currently, Physiotherapy education, rather than being evidence-based, appears to be exposure-based (Parsall and Bligh cited in Chipchase et al., 2004). Exposure-based education is based on the premise that if the students are exposed to enough hours in clinic they will eventually become competent. However, to more appropriately address the occupational challenges of society, the graduate will need a vision of the profession that incorporates evidence-based practice rather than the current exposure-based practice that makes up the majority of fieldwork placements (Thomas et al., 2004).

6 Another term used for supervisors in this particular study.
Ward & Gracey (2006) stated that supervisors should be able to practice what is learnt in a proper way in order for students to follow. In their survey on a group of United Kingdom (UK) based Physiotherapy Professional Coordinators the authors pointed out that teaching safe practice through real time experience helps a student to understand the basic rules of safe practice in the clinical field. An important management implication drawn out of the study by Ward & Gracey (2006) is that supervisors can use fieldwork practice to formulate new policies regarding the physiotherapy profession and can implement it through their students. Moreover, the authors stated that it is essential to maintain and extend professional competence for physiotherapists in the field by providing real life situations which challenge clinical reasoning abilities. If new policies are not formulated and implemented, it will be difficult for a physiotherapist to acclimatize to the ever changing scenario of medical sciences.

Thomas et al. (2007) investigated fieldwork supervisors’ perspectives regarding the benefits and challenges of providing fieldwork placements together with the issue of teaching safe practices. In fact one of their conclusions considered important to management, was that supervision of students is of considerable advantage to the host organizations in the recruitment of appropriately prepared employees. Fifty-seven per cent of respondents reported that they played a key role in the employment of occupational therapists in their workplaces, and 56% of respondents reported that they had employed previous fieldwork students. When viewed together, these two findings indicate a very strong link between fieldwork supervision and later recruitment. Since the questionnaire used in this study was sent by email the response rate was only that of 42% as it was not known how many potential participants the email finally reached.
2.9 Transition from the Classroom to the Clinic

The existence of a theory-practice gap\(^7\) in Physiotherapy has to some extent been neglected in research studies within the Physiotherapy profession. This is in stark contrast to nursing, where consideration of the relationship between theory and practice has received extensive coverage (Shariff & Masoumi, 2005; Baxter, 2007). Sharif and Masoumi (2005) studying the nursing student experiences of clinical practice through focus group discussions, stated that almost every student described in some way the lack of integration of theory into clinical practice. Baxter (2007) also studying the nursing profession suggested that the theory-practice gap inhibits the implementation of evidence-based nursing which will ultimately have a negative influence on the profession of nursing and patient outcomes. In fact the purpose of her paper was to propose a communication, collaboration, application, reflection and evaluation (CCARE) model of fieldwork supervision that will address the theory-practice gap with the intended outcome being better fieldwork practices for both the nurses and the nursing students.

The transition from the class to the clinical setting is hindered by the fact that some of the relations between the academic departments and the clinical settings are problematic, as there is a lack of effective co-operation regarding their complementary tasks (Ohman et al. 2005). This may result in the supervisors lacking proper guidelines thus finding it difficult in helping the students to link what is taught in the class with what is actually happening in the fieldwork placement. Although students may feel unprepared, an accurate awareness of the supervisor’s expectations will help students activate their coping skills which are needed to deal with the transition from the academic sphere to the fieldwork environment. In turn these skills will better equip students to face the new challenges present in fieldwork education. In contrast to what was stated by Ohman et al. (2005) fieldwork supervisors together with the academic faculty can help facilitate this process by recognizing student

\(^7\) Theory-Practice Gap describes the difference between the subject matter taught in the classroom and what is taught and practiced in the clinical setting (Baxter, 2007).
anxiety about the transition, and then teaching and supporting healthy coping strategies that will serve to reduce students' stress (Vogel et al. 2004).

Another drawback in the transition from the classroom to the clinic is the lack of hands on techniques and practical skills that are required in Physiotherapy as the academic educators at University are focused more on theory and research (Ohman et al. 2005). Ohman et al. (2005) also stated that academic educators are not always up-to-date with latest treatments and skills used in Physiotherapy practice due to lack of involvement in clinical work thus students find themselves lacking the necessary skills when on fieldwork placements. This shows the importance of fieldwork supervisors in bridging such gaps from theory to practice. In order to facilitate easier transition for students, supervisors should be aware of student perceptions about the move to the fieldwork environment, help promote the use of healthy coping skills, and be sensitive to individual differences in ability to adapt to change (Vogel et al. 2004).

2.10 Is Training in Fieldwork Supervision Required?

The lack of adequate preparation of clinical educators has been a long standing concern in the health sciences (Anderson, Rose, McGartland & Joffe as cited in Higgs et al., 2005 p.156). As a result, clinical educators lack an explicit theoretical and philosophical framework for their educational activities, integration of academic and clinical curricula suffers, and there is a mismatch between the theory and the practice of clinical educators (Anderson, Kenny & Joshi as cited in Higgs, 2005 p.156). Ryan cited by MacKenzie et al, (2001), suggested that since fieldwork supervisors feel unprepared and unqualified to supervise students effectively, fieldwork supervisor courses should be held regularly. Similarly in a study carried out by Ohman et al. (2005) amongst physiotherapists, it was suggested that in order to practice and teach evidence-based Physiotherapy, which integrates the best available research and clinician expertise, related courses in research methodology and evaluation skills are rated as highly important.
Cohn and Frum (1988) also documented the need for education of fieldwork supervisors some years ago. The authors conducted a survey of 1018 fieldwork educators and academic fieldwork coordinators identifying five priority topics for workshops including the evaluation of student performance. Given the importance of both the fieldwork experience and effective supervision, Cohn & Frum (1988) already believed that fieldwork educators needed formal preparation for the essential role of a supervisor. At the time, occupational therapists qualified as fieldwork supervisors after 1 year of experience and were not required to meet additional requirements. Consequently, lack of experience and absence of training frequently left the new supervisor searching for direction.

The only study carried out in Malta regarding this topic was in the Occupational Therapy field and it has been suggested that educational programs are needed to prepare supervisors for the dual role of meeting market demands for service delivery and for providing quality placement experiences for the next generation of health professionals. This implies that supervisors should equip students with the necessary skills of clinical reasoning in order to produce competent newly qualified health care professionals (Bonello, 1998).

2.11 Fieldwork Supervision Training Done Worldwide

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) had issued guidelines regarding fieldwork educator training. In fact the CSP (1994) differentiated two types of training programme, type A and type B. Type A programmes deal with the broad educational issues needed in workplace teaching and supervision, such as assessing students and awarding grades. Type B programmes deal directly with the course structure and the relationship between the school and the placement providers.

Lunt et al. (1996) dealt with the development of a distance course designed for occupational and physiotherapy fieldwork supervisors. The course was conducted by the School of Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy at the University of
Southampton. The work investigated the importance of courses which are designed for a small learning group of fieldwork supervisors. The authors pointed out that supervisors work with students and at the same time develop their own skills.

Mackenzie et al. (2001) discussed how a collaborative workshop was designed to meet the education needs of new and inexperienced fieldwork supervisors who could subsequently be prepared to supervise students from any of the four occupational therapy programmes in New South Wales. Results from pre-workshop questionnaires and post-workshop evaluations during the first year of presentation of the workshop, suggested that the workshop was effective in meeting the objectives of preparing fieldwork supervisors to supervise students from a variety of educational programmes.

Syles & Radloff (2001) gave some important points of how the quality of the student-supervisor relationship is paramount in achieving many of the goals of postgraduate study. Instead of 'one-off' seminars on 'How to supervise', they considered it preferable for novice supervisors to learn the art by direct participation in the process through joint supervisory arrangements with more experienced staff. Out-of-context seminars were seen to have limited value because the nature of the process is diverse, issues are particular to the individual at times, and learning experiences should be directly relevant to the novice. The authors concluded that by direct participation the synergistic relationship between the supervisor and the student would be enhanced.

2.12 Advantages of Being a Fieldwork Supervisor

Neale (2003) presented the findings of a literature search and feedback from British Columbian fieldwork educators through personal communication, feedback on student evaluation forms and feedback given during the University of British Columbia occupational therapy fieldwork educator workshops throughout British Columbia in 2001. He wanted to raise awareness about the issue of fieldwork supervision by classifying the advantages of being a fieldwork supervisor as shown in Table 2.1.
1. Allows students to bring new ideas and current thinking to your workplace
2. Stimulates your clinical reasoning skills
3. Enhances your career opportunities
4. Develops professional skills e.g. time management and priority setting
5. Provides an opportunity to share expertise with future colleagues
6. Creates and improves your links with universities and Canada Association of Occupational Therapy
7. Enhances your reputation within your workplace
8. Reduces your workload
9. Develops teaching skills
10. Deeply rewarding for all involved.

Table 2.1. Advantages of being a fieldwork supervisor (Neale, 2003, p.8, 9)

Neale (2003) only described the advantages of fieldwork supervision in his quest of finding new ways of making fieldwork education appealing to therapists and potential preceptors. The literature provided mixed responses when it came to the advantages and disadvantages of fieldwork supervision as will be seen in this section and section 2.13.

Where students are positively influenced to take up a role in the organization based on their fieldwork experiences, they would appear to do so from a position of knowledge and a sense of self-efficacy, leading to higher retention once employed (Rodger et al., 2007). Hence the link between provision of fieldwork placements and recruitment is a very significant identified benefit of fieldwork supervision. In the study on the Occupational Therapy profession carried out by Thomas et al., (2007) it was suggested that fieldwork provides supervisors with direct student contact, and affords them with opportunities to evaluate and prepare future graduates for potential recruitment into their organizations. Fifty-seven per cent of respondents in the survey by Thomas et al. (2007) were directly involved in the recruitment of occupational
therapy staff at their facility and 56% indicated that they had employed students who had undertaken fieldwork at their workplace. Despite analyzing the views of a large number of Occupational Therapy supervisors this study could have had a limitation in that the extent to which the participants were representative of the profession as a whole and representative to other professions such as that of Physiotherapy cannot be assumed.

The supervisors interviewed in a study by Ohman et al. (2005) found it stimulating, inspiring and challenging when meeting with the students. In fact the contact with students and their updated knowledge base were the most positive aspects of being clinical supervisors. Since the focus groups used in this study covered physiotherapists from four universities and from the south to the north of the country the trustworthiness of the findings of this study was increased. Another important benefit of fieldwork supervision which was also reported in the study by Thomas et al. (2007) was the development of employee skills e.g. in supervision and clinical reasoning, and the contributions of students in the form of projects, quality improvement and the development of resources.

2.13 Disadvantages of Being a Fieldwork Supervisor

The literature highlighted several disadvantages of being a fieldwork supervisor including, feeling isolated from colleagues in the workplace and from university staff during times of difficulty (MacKenzie et al. 2001) and being in situations with lack of time and resources (Thomas et al. 2007). According to Cohn and Frum (1988) the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) regional fieldwork consultants conducted a national needs assessment by distributing 1018 surveys nationally. Out of these 63% were returned: 574 were completed by fieldwork educators and 65 by academic fieldwork coordinators. The three most important problems needing resolution in fieldwork supervision identified by fieldwork educators in this study were (a) limited time for student supervision, (b) lack of integration of knowledge and skills between classroom and clinic, and (c) students’ lack of knowledge and skills.
Fieldwork supervisors also face the challenge of meeting the needs of qualified staff who at the same time have to meet their clinical workload responsibilities (Brennan and Hunt, 2001).

Wallace (2003) stated that as part of his or her professional responsibilities, the practitioner may have to prioritise regularly putting patients at the top of their agenda followed by the patients’ relatives, their colleagues, other medical and professional staff and finally the student. On their part students may feel concerned about discussing issues arising during their practice for fear of failing and occasionally feel that they present a burden to staff (Wallace, 2003). While the negative treatment of students may correspond with high levels of workload, it appears equally to reflect a set of attitudes, where operational priorities in cases of staff shortages may too easily take precedence over students’ learning needs. Whether students in such cases ‘make up the numbers’ by carrying out what they consider menial tasks or, by contrast, are given tasks beyond their level of confidence and expertise, they represent a lack of recognition of the student’s role on the ward (Hoel, Giga & Davidson, 2007).

2.13.1 The Time Factor

The clinicians acting as supervisors who provide the guidance and facilitation to the students usually have other work responsibilities in the organization and student supervision is often an additional responsibility. In fact Ladyhewsky and Barrie (1996) suggested that clinicians do have to give up some of their patient care time in order to supervise students. However, they argued that students do ‘pay back’ the facility for this supervision by providing a patient care service. In a study by Vogel et al. (2004), data was obtained through questionnaires from 81 occupational therapy fieldwork supervisors and 29 students doing second fieldwork rotations. They stated that fieldwork supervisors are challenged to handle escalated job responsibilities while still finding time to provide effective learning experiences for students. The practitioners reported these increased job responsibilities mainly due to the demands
of the managed care environment such as larger caseloads, more documentation and more administrative duties.

Sellars (2004) also suggested that fieldwork supervision in the field of physiotherapy faces several problems related to its provision. Management implications which were drawn out from this study were that although the respondents were of the opinion that they value supervision, heavy workload, busy schedules and staff shortages hinder fieldwork supervision in their place of work. The issue of lack of time both in the work with students and also with all aspects of work was evident in the study by Ohman et al. (2005) where the supervisors were ending up stressed and dissatisfied with their working conditions. Additionally the supervisors who were interviewed claimed that their employers regarded clinical education of health science students of all kinds as extremely important, but it was neither prioritized in the time schedule nor looked upon as influencing the working conditions at the clinic.

Paterson (1997) however challenged the issue of time in the study involving the Occupational Therapy profession where contrary to popular opinion she stated that, having students can actually increase clinician productivity with respect to patient care. Furthermore in the study by MacDonald, Cox and Bartlett (2002) productivity and client satisfaction were not different during the time period when the student was present in the facility compared to the therapist-alone situation. Coulton & Krimmer (2005) studying Social Work students stated that the idea of supervising a student on top of an already busy workload can appear insurmountable, and at times too difficult to justify to employers. This may lead to many social work field educators dropping out or needing regular breaks from having a student, as a result of the demanding nature of field education. They stated that co-supervision can enable the workload to be shared and provides in-built supports and breaks from supervision.
2.13.2 Remuneration for Supervisors

Extra salary for fieldwork supervisors was an issue for the supervisors interviewed in Ohman et al. (2005). These supervisors declared that, the fact that the extra salary previously paid to them has been withdrawn was very negative since the extra money was appreciated as an addition to the poor salary of physiotherapists. They argued that providing an incentive was a means of keeping the staff happy even in times when the supervisors were kind of forced to take on supervision of students. Unlike the provision of patient care, clinical education is far from being a 'core' responsibility. In fact in the qualitative study carried out by Currens and Bithell (2000) they concluded that students are considered an additional burden and a secondary commitment, performed only by selected individuals in particular circumstances. They continued to argue that the payment of an allowance to clinicians to remunerate the 'additional' work of student supervision supports the notion of 'added burden' rather than core role.

According to the survey results in a study by Casares et al. (2003), 42.4% of clinical fieldwork educators believed reimbursement issues did not affect their ability to accept fieldwork students, whereas 82.4% of academic fieldwork coordinators believed reimbursement issues had negatively affected the clinician educator's ability to accept fieldwork students. In the same study academic coordinators and fieldwork educators believed, however, that multiple responsibilities of clinicians have negatively affected the quality of fieldwork education, and clinicians may be concerned that their productivity would decrease while supervising students.
2.14 Conclusion

Basic professional skills and clinical reasoning abilities necessary for novice physiotherapists are achieved through fieldwork experiences, as academically based learning is integrated through the practical application of that learning in the clinical field of practice. By acquiring clinical reasoning skills, students begin to understand the need to consider many human and nonhuman factors when judging how to provide appropriate and personalized intervention for individuals (Allison & Turpin, 2004). In the next chapter I will present the methodology used in the study describing the population under study with the rationale for the study method and approach.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS
Chapter 3 Methods

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter a review of the available literature was provided; in this chapter the research methodology used in the study will be discussed. I will begin the section by stating the research topic and the main operational definition. A review of the literature which contributed to my methodological thinking will also be presented. Sampling technique and ethical issues relating to the study are to be discussed. Data was collected from physiotherapists acting as supervisors, Physiotherapy Managers, members of the Educational Institution and a group of Physiotherapy students in their final year of studies by the use of semi-structured interviews and focus groups together with the collection of field notes. I also carried out an analysis of relevant published literature.

As the study was undertaken in a department where, for a number of years, I used to practice and am still practicing as a physiotherapist, the issue of 'insiderness' was also considered. On the one hand the 'insider' in me is a source of evidence that informs the study as a researcher in his own environment: as a previous student sitting for lectures and attending fieldwork placements, as a physiotherapist now working in the particular setting of study and acting as a fieldwork supervisor. On the other hand my 'insiderness' could be problematic because I might not have given sufficient attention to issues that I may have taken for granted. However, I used this issue for the best advantage and tried to stay away from biases.

3.2 Research Topic

Since the aim of this study was to determine whether Maltese physiotherapists acknowledge the need for training in student supervision, the following research topic was studied: 'A needs assessment for training physiotherapists in fieldwork supervision'. Besides training, other issues will be tackled including attitudes of the
people involved as well as if the current practice is meeting the students' needs and the needs of the profession.

3.3 Operational Definition

As already identified\textsuperscript{1} the term 'fieldwork supervision' was used in this study. This term was taken to mean what Cohn and Frum (1988) had suggested as a dynamic teaching-learning experience, an education process that serves as a bridge between previously learned knowledge and clinical skill, and a mechanism that ensures an experiential learning environment. Fieldwork supervision should not be mixed up with the term 'clinical supervision' which was defined by The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, UK, as “a collaborative process between two or more practitioners of the same or different professions” (Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, 2005, p.3) but rather as fieldwork education which is “the education and training of students on pre- and post-qualifying programmes” (Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, 2005, p.4). This shows that 'clinical supervision' is linked with already qualified practitioners whereas fieldwork education is linked with supervision of students.

3.4 The Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative approach using the hermeneutic phenomenological method. Phenomenology is an inductive, descriptive research method, which considers all that is available in the experience under study, both subjective and objective and strives to understand the total meaning the experience has for the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a). Creswell (1998) stated that phenomenology is useful when a topic has to be further explored. Since my research topic needed to be explored in depth the choice of a qualitative approach was the most appropriate. The literature search revealed that little qualitative work has been done in studying fieldwork supervision especially in the field of Physiotherapy in Malta. Therefore, this research intended to produce an increased depth of information and to present a

\textsuperscript{1} Chapter 1, page 4.
more detailed view of the topic which could potentially contribute to a wider knowledge base in this area of study.

3.4.1 Philosophical Underpinnings of Phenomenology

Husserl’s (1970) phenomenology is considered the first attempt to understand the study of phenomena as they appear through the consciousness (Cresswell, 1998; Burke, 1999; Jasper, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a). Central to Husserl’s approach is the fundamental recognition of experience as the ultimate ground and meaning of knowledge (Koch, 1995). Although Husserl introduced the concept of life-world or lived experience, his method focuses on a description of the lived world that conceptualizes people as detached subjects existing in a world of objects (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a). A researcher adopting this type of phenomenology brackets his own prior beliefs, values and knowledge and stands outside the research process, assuming a distance and objectivity at all stages of the research (Lowes & Prowse, 2001). Since I was carrying out this study in my workplace, this approach was problematic as I felt that it would be extremely hard to be entirely objective. I decided to angle my approach not using Husserl’s ideas but a closely related one: the phenomenology as developed by Heidegger.

Husserl’s student, Heidegger, attempted to answer the question of the meaning of being and tried to understand the essence of an individual’s being, acknowledging the uniqueness of individual experiences whilst searching for commonalities of meaning (Koch, 1995). Heideggerian phenomenology is also referred to as Interpretative or Hermeneutic phenomenology. Heidegger rejected the notion that researchers are observing subjects separated from the world of objects, about which they try to gain knowledge, but rather they are beings inseparable from an already existing world (Burke, 1999). The presuppositions the researcher brings to the research experience are examined and made explicit rather than suspended (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003b). Data generated by the participants is fused with the experience of the researcher and
placed in context. This co-constitution of data is the main distinguishing characteristic from Husserl’s phenomenology (Koch, 1995).

My main preconceptions relevant to this study included the fact that apart from being a physiotherapist myself, most of the time I act as a fieldwork supervisor to students.\(^2\) Another preconception is the fact that whilst acting as a fieldwork supervisor I had encountered problems related to supervising students in the past mainly due to the fact that no training whatsoever was ever given related to supervision. Therefore, Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology was the more appropriate method to use to answer the research inquiry of this study, particularly because of my own experience of acting as a fieldwork supervisor. Bracketing or complete reduction of such experience, and preconceptions, as suggested by Husserl, would have been difficult to achieve, thus making Heidegger’s method the better choice.

### 3.5 Inclusion Criteria and Sampling

Data was sought from different sections, both clinical and educational. On the managerial level the Manager of the Physiotherapy services in Malta and the two principal physiotherapists in charge at Mater Dei Hospital were interviewed. This was done in order to avoid direct reference to the Manager of Physiotherapy thus ensuring anonymity. There were no selection criteria within this group and therefore all the three available managers were interviewed. In the case of physiotherapists working at the acute setting\(^3\) at Mater Dei Hospital, the sample group was selected purposively with the aim of incorporating all the physiotherapists’ views working in the acute setting. Purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method, is quick and provides an opportunity to select participants with the characteristic of interest and is considered appropriate for hermeneutic studies (Polit, Beck & Hungler, 2001). I selected ten physiotherapists acting as fieldwork supervisors purposively, trying to include the ones that would be most representative and productive in accordance with

---

\(^2\) The issue of ‘insiderness’ was discussed at the beginning of this chapter (Page 31).

\(^3\) This refers to a setting where patients spend a relatively short time at hospital.
the aim of the study (Polit et al., 2001). In fact I made sure that there would be a mixture of experiences ranging from experienced physiotherapists to physiotherapists that have been appointed senior physiotherapists and only till recently have started supervising students. Two other physiotherapists were selected to participate in a pilot study and since no substantial changes were made in the interview schedule to use for the main study, the findings of these physiotherapists were included with the data produced from the other participants. The questions used in this pilot study were only slightly adapted to be used in the interviews with the Education Institution, Physiotherapy Managers as well as in the focus groups with students (Appendix 2). The sample size reflected the need to achieve a balance between the time available to work on the study, the length of each interview and the appreciation of the depth and associated time needs to undertake transcription and analysis (Whitehead, 2004). According to Whitehead (2004), such a sample size is considered appropriate in hermeneutic studies.

The Physiotherapy course coordinator and the person in charge of clinical placements were also interviewed. Again here there were no selection criteria within this group. Ten out of twelve Physiotherapy students in their 4th year of studies accepted to take part in this study and were interviewed through a focus group. These were split into two groups as not all the students were able to attend on the same date. These 10 students were interviewed through focus groups as not all students go through the same clinical placements and therefore by using the whole sample, better ideas can be achieved.

3.6 Data Collection

Throughout this study three types of data collection tools were used namely interviews\(^5\), reflective diary and a review of the available literature. A brief background of the study was sent to the chosen interviewees in advance of the

\(^4\) Appendix 2, Page 123.

\(^5\) Focus groups in the case of Physiotherapy students
proposed interview period, to allow for personal reflection before meeting for the discussion (Appendix 3). A reply slip consisting of the consent form to participate was enclosed with each information pack. Those who returned it were contacted to set up a suitable interview time and place. In the case of students it was more difficult to set a date when all students would be able to attend for the focus group since not all the students were based at Mater Dei Hospital. Hence they were split in two groups attending on two different dates. In order to include as many of the participants as possible a window of three to four weeks was offered for this meeting.

Data collection is the process of gathering information needed to address a research question (Polit et al., 2001). Audio-taped semi-structured interviews were the method of data collection used which provided a situation where the participants' ideas could be explored, illuminated and gently probed (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000). These semi-structured interviews were seen to be particularly useful since I was free to probe and follow up points as they arose (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). One may note however that albeit producing interesting points, not all were relevant to this study. A semi-structured interview schedule was developed for the purpose of this study (Appendix 2). I sought advice from my supervisor and amendments were made until the tool was finalized. A pilot study which according to Polit et al. (2001) is a small scale preliminary study conducted before the main research in order to check the feasibility or to improve the design of the research was also carried out with two physiotherapists prior to carrying out the interviews.

3.6.1 Interviews

The advantages of face-to-face interviews include clarifying any ambiguities and asking detailed questions for more information. This helps to draw out the perceptions and experiences of individuals, expressed in their own words. For example, one of the questions I asked in the interviews with physiotherapists acting as fieldwork supervisors was that regarding the skills required in performing this task.

---

6 Appendix 3, Page 128.
The disadvantages are that interviews are time-consuming, there is the potential for interviewer bias and the interviewee may not feel at ease to divulge the complete truth so that answers to questions may be biased (Bowling, 2002). I tried to limit some of these disadvantages by keeping a constant interview schedule throughout the interview making use of standard probes.

During the interviews my role was to guide the interview and keep the respondent focused on the topic. I was also aware of various elements to ensure successful in-depth interviewing such as asking open-ended questions and asking participants to clarify and elaborate on what they would have said. Each interview lasted between thirty to forty five minutes and there were no particular problems encountered.

Interviews with the members of the Education Institution were held in their respective offices whilst those with the Physiotherapy management were held at the staff office at the Physiotherapy Department. The interviews with the physiotherapists acting as supervisors were held in the staff room when these were held after working hours or else in a Physiotherapy treatment room at the Physiotherapy Department. The choice of place and time of the interviews was the most feasible for the participants.

The interviews were conducted in English\(^7\) to avoid translation, however, two of the respondents felt more comfortable replying in Maltese. Although I am fluent in both languages in order to have as faithful a translation as possible, the method of back-translation was used, where after transcription the interviews were first translated into English then back into Maltese by a second person. By comparing the original Maltese version with the second one, I was able to ensure that the translations were accurate.

\(^7\) English is the co-official language of Malta together with the Maltese language
3.6.2 Focus Groups

Data about the students' views and experiences was collected in focus group discussions split into two groups. The idea of gathering the students in a focus group is that by discussing different experiences and ideas on a few themes, the interview will get a broader scope of opinions and ideas about the topic in focus, than in the case with interviews on an individual basis (Ohman et al., 2005). I opted for the use of focus groups since I perceived that some of the students might have found it difficult to express themselves in a one-to-one interview with me occasionally acting as their supervisor. When listening to each other in the group, participants reflected on each other's opinions and expressed their own views on topics and ideas introduced by other students (Dahlgren et al. cited in Ohman et al., 2005). Brainstorming was encouraged allowing for an exchange of new ideas and a revelation of issues related to the topic under study. The main problem with focus groups is that confidentiality is not obtained in group settings, and the presence of others can be inhibiting to some respondents (Bowling, 2002).

The focus groups with students took longer than the interviews as more responses were achieved. Initially, respondents found it difficult to respond one at a time however gradually students took it in turns to give their responses to the questions asked.

3.6.3 Audiotaping and Transcribing

All the interviews and focus groups were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. Using audiotaping to record all interviews, helped increase reliability as this provided an accurate account of what had been said (Appleton, 1995). Two main disadvantages of audiotaping are that participants may not feel comfortable knowing that they are being recorded all the time and the process of listening and transcribing the interviews is time consuming (Martin, 2000). Although all participants gave their consent to this practice, the tape recorder was still placed in a low profile location in
the room so that interviewees would not feel uncomfortable. As expected, the recordings were muffled and so immediate transcription helped me remember the actual content of the interviews. Each interview transcript was coded in order to maintain anonymity as seen in Table 3.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHYSIOTHERAPY MANAGERS (one-to-one interview)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• MAN1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• MAN2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• MAN3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHYSIOTHERAPISTS (one-to-one interview)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• PHY1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PHY2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PHY3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PHY4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PHY5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PHY6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PHY7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PHY8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PHY9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PHY10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PHY11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PHY12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EDUCATION INSTITUTION (one-to-one interview)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• EDU1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• EDU2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHYSIOTHERAPY STUDENTS (Focus Group)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• STU1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• STU2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1. Coding of transcribed interviews and focus groups

I was aware that the manner in which participants are approached and questioned in an interview influences the type of response participants are willing to volunteer, and the amount of discussion they are willing to enter into. Literature (Whitehead, 2004;
Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) suggests that throughout the interviews, the researcher should take fieldnotes, which includes observations to supplement the taped interviews, namely a written account of the things the researcher heard, saw, experienced and thought in the course of collecting or reflecting on the data. However, since all the interviews were recorded and because I thought that the taking down of such fieldnotes during the course of the interviews could have caused distraction during interviews both for participants and for myself, I decided to write down these fieldnotes as soon as I left the place of the interview. A main limitation to this was that it was impossible to remember every single detail which during the course of the interview I deemed important.

3.6.4 Reflective Diary

Another type of data collection used in this study was by keeping a reflective diary collecting fieldnotes during the period of study. This can be considered as an additional source of data helping in the triangulation of data. The reflective diary included both personal reflections throughout the study as well as conversations or incidents I deemed useful to the study. Bowling (2002, p.358) states that observation is a research method in which the investigator systematically watches, listens to and records the phenomenon of interest. The fieldnotes collected included the bare minimum detail of incidents and conversations such as the date and time, who was speaking and the place the conversations occurred. Moreover, key quotes were written down verbatim.

3.6.5 Review of Available Literature

Apart from the interviews and fieldnotes I also carried out an analysis of relevant published literature which was discussed in the previous chapter. I used the literature as an additional source of data providing me with insights into the topic under study.

Fieldnotes refers to writings produced in or in close proximity to the field representing just-observed events and conversations. (Atkinson et al. 2007)
This was also helpful in analyzing the results of this study as will be seen in Chapter 5.

3.7 Rigour

Rigour relates to the overall planning and implementation of the research design and concerns whether a study has been carried out in a logical and systematic way or not. The interdependence of qualitative research demands that the question matches the method, which in turn matches the data and the analytic procedures. When considering the rigour of a qualitative study one needs to consider credibility, transferability, confirmability and auditability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.7.1 Credibility

A measure of the credibility or validity of the data can be obtained by the degree of confidence the researcher inspires in others (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Bowling, 2002). According to Bowling (2002) validity is an assessment of whether an instrument measures what it aims to measure. One way how I could assure the reader of the credibility of the study was by prolonged engagement where sufficient time was invested in data collection activities. This was done in order to have an in-depth understanding of the views of the participants under study and to test for misinformation.

Another very important technique in ensuring validity is using member checking which refers to the process of returning the interview transcripts to the participants who were asked to check the accuracy of interpretation. This was done by sending the interview transcript by email and asking participants to send any additions or amendments a couple of days later. No amendments were deemed necessary and the transcripts were compared to the fieldnotes to further increase credibility. Another aspect of credibility is researcher credibility. In Heideggerian phenomenological research, the researcher’s background, qualifications, experience, prior knowledge
and preconceptions of study phenomena are interconnected with the research influencing responses to participants, data generation and analysis (Polit et al, 2001). Consequently, the credibility of the reported findings rests not only on the procedures used to generate and analyze findings but also on the self-awareness of the researcher throughout the research process. Hence, the use of the reflective diary to acknowledge and document such information was helpful in increasing critical self-awareness. This is referred to as reflexivity which in the absence of statistical tests for validity and reliability is crucial to qualitative research if it is to be persuasive (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a).

My experiences as a physiotherapist as well as a fieldwork supervisor may have had the unconscious effect of influencing the data collection and analytical processes. Consequently, despite taking a Heideggerian approach, to minimize the effects of prior experiences, a mild form of bracketing was used. This phenomenological technique helps the researcher to “bracket preconceptions so as not to inject hypotheses, questions, or personal experiences into the study” (Cresswell, 1998, p33). In combination with the reflective diary, this technique was beneficial in helping me ‘bracket’ off pre-conceived ideas about the subject. This process was even more significant when one considers that I was familiar with the majority of the respondents.

3.7.2 Transferability

Transferability, comparable with generalizability, relates to the extent to which the researcher can see similarities in the findings that may relate to other similar settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Considering the time at hand and the differences from one hospital to another it was not the intention of this research study to generalize findings to a larger population but rather to understand in-depth fieldwork experiences within the Maltese physiotherapists working in the acute setting at Mater Dei Hospital.
3.7.3 Confirmability

Confirmability, comparable with objectivity or neutrality, is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not inventions of the researcher’s imagination, but are clearly derived from the data (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Verifications of the interpretations with the participants and using verbatim extracts from the participants’ own discussions help to aid confirmability of the findings. I also kept record of all documentation of the entire research process should this become necessary by others.

3.7.4 Auditability

To ensure auditability, the exact methods of data gathering, analysis and interpretation were described so that readers can judge the dependability or reliability of this qualitative study. Clearly describing each stage of the research process, explaining and justifying what was done and why, increases auditability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reliability refers to the homogeneity of the instrument and the degree to which it is free from random error (Bowling, 2002). The piloting of the semi-structured interview used with physiotherapists increased reliability of the study and also helped me to develop the interviewing skills prior to the main study. Audio-taping also provided a detailed insight into my performance as well as that of the respondent. This is because the audio-tapes contain word for word all that was said during the interviews hence everything is captured with complete accuracy. It also reduced the potential for researcher error by, for instance, recording data incorrectly or logging an answer to a question that was not asked (Barriball & While, 1994).
3.8 Ethical Considerations

3.8.1 Approval to Carry Out the Study

The acquisition of the approval from the Board of Studies, was followed by the consent of the Ethics Committee (Appendix 4). Permission was sought from the Registrar of the University of Malta to interview physiotherapy students and members of staff in the study (Appendix 5). Authorization was also sought from the Manager of Physiotherapy services to provide me with a list of physiotherapists working in the acute setting as well as permission to carry out the interviews in the Physiotherapy Department at Mater Dei Hospital (Appendix 5). Finally in order to gain access to the research site consent from the Hospital Chief Executive Officer (CEO) was gained (Appendix 5).

3.8.2 Informed Consent

Prior to the commencement of the research process the participants were informed about the purpose and nature of the study and asked to give their informed consent in writing (Appendix 3). They were all advised that even if they gave consent to participate in the study they were entirely free to terminate their participation at any time or to decline to answer certain questions.

3.8.3 Anonymity and Confidentiality

Since data collection was done through face-to-face interviews, I ensured that confidentiality would be maintained and assured the participants that all the information they conveyed would be kept confidential and used only for the purpose of the study and known only to myself. In so doing anonymity was maintained and the readers of this study will only read verbatim quotes which are coded. All

---

9 Appendix 4, Page 141.
10 Appendix 5, Page 143.
interviews were conducted in private areas. Participants were also informed that following the completion of the study all interview recordings and transcriptions will be disposed of (Appendix 3). Anonymity in the case of interviewing the manager and principals of physiotherapy as well as the members of the Education Institution was the most difficult to preserve since they were only a few. However, since it was regarded that what they say could carry more weight the interviews were still carried out.

3.9 The Process of Data Analysis and Interpretation

A key concept of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) \(^{11}\) is that interpretation and the research process is dynamic where one is trying to get close to the participant’s personal world, to take an ‘insider’s perspective’ but one cannot do this directly or completely (Smith, Jannan & Osborn, 1999). Access depended on, and was complicated by my own conceptions, as I am a physiotherapist acting as a supervisor myself, and indeed these conceptions were required in order to make sense of the other person’s world through a process of interpretative activity.

I chose to carry out this interpretative phenomenological analysis manually on the premise that the sample size was small enough for me to proceed. I could have used a computer package, however, apart from possible ethical problems Denzin & Lincoln (1998) stated that in such programs the emphasis on codes and categories can produce endless variable analyses that fail to take into account important situational and contextual factors. There was no particular order from where to start transcribing the interviews hence the first interview transcript of the interview done to the first physiotherapist was chosen. The transcript was read and re-read in order to become familiar with the ideas discussed, since each reading was likely to produce new insights. At this stage, some of my comments included attempts at summarizing, associations or connections that came to mind, or preliminary interpretations. I went though the whole interview making preliminary notes on the right margin, then the

\(^{11}\) Based on Heideggerain phenomenology, see Page 33.
left margin was used to document emerging theme titles, that is, using key words to include the essential quality of what was being found in the text. At this preliminary stage the key words were not definitive but enabled me to articulate something about the concept identified.

At this stage the entire transcript was treated as potential data and no attempt was made to omit or select particular passages for special attention. On a separate sheet the emerging themes were listed and connections between them were sought. Some of the themes clustered together and some were regarded as “superordinate concepts” (Smith, 2008, pg 72). As new clusters of themes emerged, the transcript was re-checked to make sure that the connections worked for the primary source material, which is what the participants actually said. This form of analysis involved a close interaction between myself and the text, attempting to understand what the person is saying but, as part of the process, drawing on my interpretative resources.

The next stage was to produce a master list or table of the themes and which was arranged coherently (Smith, 2008). For example, themes such as ‘Definitions of fieldwork supervision’ and ‘Role of fieldwork supervisors’, preceded themes, such as, ‘Grading the students’ and ‘Subjects to be included in training’. It was ensured that each theme was represented in the verbatim transcript, and where appropriate, the master list also identified sub-themes which related to some of the main themes. I also indicated where in the transcript instances of the particular theme can be found by using verbatim extracts indicating the interview code and the paragraph number where in the transcripts these could be found. Some of the themes were governed by and followed closely the questions on the interview schedule, but others were completely new as some respondents tackled the subject in a different way from that anticipated by the researcher (Smith & Osborn, 2004). At this stage I kept in mind that analysis is a cyclical process, and it was necessary to go through the stages a number of times, dropping a certain theme when a more useful one emerged.
When the first interview was analysed I moved on to analyse the rest of the interviews going through the stages outlined above and producing a master list for each interview. When this process had been repeated with each transcript, the resulting sets of initial themes were examined to identify recurrent patterns across the transcripts, producing a final set of superordinate themes (Touroni & Coyle, 2002). Of particular importance was the fact that since I had transcripts from four different perspectives of the topic under study it was very important that the master lists for each interview were read together and a consolidated list of master themes for all these respondents was produced. Since the process is cyclical, when new themes emerged in subsequent interviews, they were tested against earlier transcripts. Themes were not selected purely on the basis of their prevalence within the data. Other factors, including the richness of the particular passages which highlighted the themes and how the theme helped illuminate other aspects of the account, were also taken into account.

3.10 Conclusion

The next chapter will explore how the main themes of this study emerged. This is then followed by an analysis and discussion of the mentioned findings.

12 Physiotherapy Managers, Physiotherapists, Education Institution and Students.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS
Chapter 4 Results

4.1 Introduction

An interpretative phenomenological analysis of the transcribed interviews was conducted and a number of themes emerged. In this chapter I will use figures to present the process whereby the key quotes by the participants were grouped together into emerging themes and finally producing the master themes and sub-themes which will be analysed and discussed in Chapter 5.

4.2 Figures showing the Emergence of the Main Themes of this Study

The following figures show how the key quotes by the participants in this study were grouped together into emerging themes. Additionally the responses to three direct questions which were asked during the interviews are presented. For a detailed explanation of the above process refer to pages 45-47. At the end of this chapter the themes are grouped together producing the main themes and sub-themes which will then be analysed and discussed in Chapter 5.
For a detailed analysis of the above table refer to pages 63-64.
Figure 4.2. The Role of the Fieldwork Supervisor

For a detailed analysis of the following table refer to pages 65-68.
Figure 4.3. Skills needed by Physiotherapists acting as Fieldwork Supervisors

An analysis of the above table can be found in pages 68-70.
Key Quotes

By Physiotherapists
- Prepare future workforce
- Added Skill
- Job Satisfaction
- Personal Satisfaction
- Reflective Practice
- Keeping up-to-date
- Learning from students
- Lifelong learning
- Continuous Learning

By Physiotherapy Managers
- Reflective Practice
- Development of supervisory competence
- Huge source of stimulation
- Keeps you in touch by having a perspective of a younger generation
- Access to new knowledge
- Extra Pair of hands

By Education Institution
- Keeping up-to-date
- Evidence-based practice enhanced

Emerging Themes
- Invest in future workforce
- Added Skill
- Personal Satisfaction
- Reflective Practice
- Continuous Learning
- Extra pair of Hands

Master Theme
- Advantages of Fieldwork Supervision

Figure 4.4. Advantages of Fieldwork Supervision
Refer to pages 70-72 for further analysis of this table.
Figure 4.5. Disadvantages of Fieldwork Supervision
Further analysis of this table can be found in pages 72-74.
Students need to feel welcomed

Friendliness

Subjectivity in grading students has to be decreased

Feel welcomed

Decreased subjectivity in grading

Good communication between student and supervisor

Communication

Proper Guidelines

Given space to practice

Proper Guidelines

Students should be given the space to use what has been learnt in class in practice

Elements that make up a Positive Fieldwork placement

Further analysis of the above table can be found in pages 76-77.
Figure 4.7. Elements that make up a Negative Fieldwork placement
Refer to pages 77-80 for further analysis of the above table.
Figure 4.8. Needs in the area of Fieldwork Supervision

*The above table is analysed and discussed in further detail in pages 80-88.*
Figure 4.9. Main Subjects to be Included in Training
Refer to pages 88-89 for further explanation of the above table.
Do you have the skills to act as a fieldwork supervisor?
(\textit{Question asked to the 12 Physiotherapists})

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{chart1}
\caption{Chart 1: Direct questions asked to participants}
\end{figure}

Is training in fieldwork supervision required?
(\textit{Question asked to the 12 Physiotherapists})

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{chart2}
\caption{Chart 2: Direct questions asked to participants}
\end{figure}

Are Physiotherapists well trained to act as fieldwork supervisors?
(\textit{Question asked to the 10 Students under study})

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{chart3}
\caption{Chart 3: Direct questions asked to participants}
\end{figure}

Figure 4.10. Direct questions asked to participants
4.3 Grouping up of Themes

The following is a list which presents the themes and sub-themes which emerged from the interviews and will be discussed in the next chapter:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Definitions of fieldwork supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Role of fieldwork supervisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Skills needed by physiotherapists acting as fieldwork supervisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Advantages of fieldwork supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Disadvantages of fieldwork supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Elements that make up a positive fieldwork placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Negative experiences/practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Needs felt in the area of fieldwork supervision within the physiotherapy profession in Malta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Decreased workload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Clear guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Subjects to be included in training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Further Research in the area of Fieldwork Supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Grading the students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Liaison with the Education Institution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 Master list of themes and sub-themes
4.4 Conclusion

The data is analysed and discussed in the following chapter, where the answers given by the different stakeholders namely physiotherapists acting as supervisors, Physiotherapy students, Physiotherapy Managers and members of the Education Institution, are compared and contrasted with the literature found in Chapter 2. This is accompanied by the use of verbatim quotations in order for the reader to follow through what is being discussed.
CHAPTER 5
ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS
Chapter 5 Analysis and Discussion of Results

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will analyze the results of this study and where possible, compare the findings with those found in the literature. The responses given by the different stakeholders will be presented by the use of verbatim quotes together with the particular topic discussed in order for the reader to follow. These will be discussed in the order according to the themes as presented in Table 4.1. Finally, the study limitations will also be presented.

5.2 Definitions of Fieldwork Supervision

One of the objectives of the study was that of identifying the current practices in dealing with students' clinical education. Hence respondents in this study were first asked to define fieldwork supervision and then to identify what they think is the role of fieldwork supervisors. The majority of students were more comfortable identifying the role of the supervisor than defining fieldwork supervision, apart from one student who defined fieldwork supervision as:

"the supervision by someone who is qualified in clinical work. However he has to be up to date with what is going on academically that is at the University." (STU2, Student 7, para. 1)

The physiotherapists' responses ranged from having a qualified member of staff as guidance for the students, to someone who assesses the students at the end of their clinical placements:

---

1 Table 4.1 is found in Chapter 4, Page 60.
2 Role of fieldwork supervisor in Figure 4.2, Page 51.
3 'para.': refers to the paragraph number as found in the transcriptions.
"Fieldwork supervision of students involves first demonstrating then assessing students in terms of assessment and treatment of patients with constant supervision and gradually with decline in input from the physiotherapist to the student himself." (PHY6, para. 1)

"having an experienced physiotherapist guiding the students through their placement, making sure that they gather as much experience as possible related to their assessments” (PHY9, para.1)

PHY10 stated that by having a qualified member of staff the quality of the service provided is also improved:

"Fieldwork supervision in my opinion means the presence of a qualified member of staff in the presence of students who will supervise and instruct students how to perform safely the implementation of treatment and basic theoretical knowledge about that treatment being applied.” (PHY10, para. 1)

The definition given by EDU1 was more focused on the students, with the supervisor however, having to be an expert in the particular field who is there to ensure that safe practices are being carried out:

"Fieldwork supervision is when you ensure that a student is able to practice a technique or a task safely and effectively in the presence of an expert in that particular field.” (EDU1, para. 1)

The emerging themes in this study when defining fieldwork supervision were therefore similar to the definitions found in the literature. Similar to the study by Casares et al., (2003) the main issue was that the students should be helped in refining their skills under the presence of qualified personnel.
5.3 Role of Fieldwork Supervisors

The importance of fieldwork supervision was something that almost every participant in the study agreed with. For example MAN2 suggested that fieldwork supervisors have a very important role in ensuring the quality of future physiotherapists by stating that:

“What we invest in our students would come back to us as a service. It will come back to our public, it will come back to our population, to our organization. Its worth investing in it. If we can’t take that on board, its better not to have students.” (MAN2, para.12)

Student 9 also looked at this topic as a preparation for the future with particular attention to workload and time management:

“Fieldwork supervisors are also there to prepare you in order to manage work in the future. In order to manage a work in the future, including the workload, time management, so it is quite important to have good fieldwork supervision.” (STUI, Student 9, para.8)

Physiotherapists view the fieldwork supervisor as a guide rather than a teacher. PHY8 for example, sustained that the formal learning aspect is the responsibility of the Education Institution:

“If I am acting as a fieldwork supervisor, my job would be just to make sure that they are doing their work correctly. But it is not the case. A lot of the time I am more a teacher than a fieldwork supervisor with students” (PHY8, para.5)

* Students 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 9 & 10 took part in focus group STU1 whereas students 3, 6 & 7 took part in focus group STU2.
Even EDU1 agreed with the fact that the fieldwork supervisor is there to give feedback by stating that:

"feedback from the actual expert in the field, telling him how he did it and what things he need to improve on and what things the student need to be careful about." (EDU1, para.2)

Some things however cannot be taught in class therefore fieldwork supervisors should be capable of showing the students the technical part of the profession. The issue of theory-practice gap was an issue that both the students and the Physiotherapy managers mentioned:

"The students come to us with the basic knowledge. It is within the clinical setting that they develop that knowledge so they've got to learn, students have got to be supervised in the way that they manage knowledge. Apart from the knowledge there is the technical part of our work, the technique. So there is the technical side and the techniques" (MAN2, para.9)

"Still we need to take information from that supervisor because although you have studied the subject before, the class is very different from the real clinical situation." (STU1, Student 5, para.7)

Students 1 and 9 voiced their concerns that they should be able to achieve the practical hands on skills to be able to deal with patients by the end of their course. The views of these students corresponded with those in the study by Wessel and Larin (2006) where they determined that in the later placement, students were more confident and more focused on the client compared with their first placement.

This gives the fieldwork supervisors a huge responsibility as they have to make sure that the students assigned to them are learning properly. The management must therefore make sure that safe practices are taught in order to avoid future
repercussions. EDU2 compared a student to a ‘sponge’ absorbing everything they see in the clinical world:

"student is like a sponge and will absorb what is shown to them more in the clinical world than during the classroom. Therefore if what they see is correct than they will learn the correct manner thus becoming competent physiotherapists" (EDU2, para.2)

This issue was also evident in the responses of the students with Student 1 stating:

"The student will be learning from what the supervisors are doing, things that maybe you haven’t covered during the course, because the course despite trying to cover loads of topics some topics in the clinical setting can’t be imitated in the class." (STUI, Student 1, para.6)

On their part PHY3, PHY8 and PHY10 acknowledged this increased responsibility and admitted that they should review their own skills in order to provide proper fieldwork supervision. This idea corresponds with the study by Reid and McKay (2001) with occupational therapy fieldwork educators, where all of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that self-evaluation promotes professional development. This is a very important managerial issue as by encouraging self-evaluation bad practices are corrected. PHY8 suggested that this is aided by providing policies regarding standards of practice that need to be followed.

Other roles of the fieldwork supervisors which according to students are lacking in Malta were those of providing feedback as well as being a source of information.

"One thing I found from my Erasmus experience is that they used a lot of positive feedback, in conjunction with the negative feedback, something that I feel is lacking here. Obviously, the importance to highlight the bad is
necessary for learning, however, reinforcing the positive is also extremely important for the learning process." (Field note 11, Student 4)

Providing feedback, however, as suggested by PHY8 requires time which due to the demanding workloads is lacking in the clinical field. Regular meetings have to take place where feedback can be given and thus allowing students to develop their ideas and their individuality. As Buttery et al. (2005) suggested the managerial framework has to change whereby only physiotherapists with decreased workload should be assigned students.

Students 4, 7 and 10, highlighted the needs that physiotherapists acting as supervisors need to carry out additional research and involve themselves in continuous professional development in order to be able to give up-to-date information to the students. This is another important managerial issue where the issue of lifelong learning should be high on the agenda despite busy workloads.

5.4 Skills Needed by Physiotherapists Acting as Fieldwork Supervisors

The main aim of this study was to determine whether training is necessary to provide proper fieldwork supervision. Additionally, my objectives included identifying the current practices and whether these practices are meeting the needs of the profession. Hence respondents were asked what skills they think are needed to act as fieldwork supervisors. Out of the twelve physiotherapists interviewed only PHY2, PHY6, PHY10 and PHY11 felt that they have the necessary skills to act as fieldwork supervisors with the remaining respondents admitting that they do not have the skills or opting not to give a definite answer such as:

"Being a capable physiotherapist, trying to cover the daily case load and trying to deal with students needs time, you need more equipment, more apparatus, more venues, more up to date information. You need also to be nearly full-time with the students." (PHY5, para.3)
Although for them fieldwork supervision did not mean acting as teachers some physiotherapists (1, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 11) argued that providing feedback, guiding and assessing students entail having a high level of teaching skills. They felt that the fact that they have graduated as physiotherapists does not automatically make them good teachers. This teaching issue was not that apparent in the literature as studies focused more on the social skills, communication skills as well as the clinical reasoning as the skills necessary to act as fieldwork supervisors rather than acting as teachers (Turnock et al., 2005; Edwards & Baptiste, cited by MacKenzie et al. 2001).

EDU1 for example, argued that the social skills, communication skills as well as the clinical reasoning were also skills necessary to act as fieldwork supervisors. Clinical reasoning is an important management issue as it is the way forward for competent clinicians who are meant to meet the changing needs in healthcare. Patience was a skill which was mentioned by PHY8 and PHY10 with PHY8 adding that it makes fieldwork supervision more time consuming. Consider the following statement:

"I think you have to have patience with some of the students in particular. I think you have to have also time...... Students are normally very slow so a lot of the times I have to stop to correct them, to show them how to do things."

(PHY8, para.3)

Experience in the specialty was also considered a necessary skill to act as fieldwork supervisors by PHY2, PHY5 and PHY10. In fact PHY2, PHY10 and PHY11 who had been working in the same clinical setting for a number of years were more confident in carrying out their duty as supervisors. Some however tended to disagree with this statement. For example both PHY2 and PHY4 had been working in their setting for over 10 years. Whereas PHY2 felt that he had acquired the necessary skills to act as a fieldwork supervisor by time, PHY4 stated that without training physiotherapists were not capable to act as supervisors in a proper way and that experience alone was not enough. The other respondent (PHY6) who felt he had the skills to act as a supervisor stated that he got the skills from other professions.
PHY9, PHY11 and Student 5 argued that not every physiotherapist can act as a fieldwork supervisor and that there were some who had innate skills:

"I believe that not every physiotherapist can be a supervisor" (PHY9, para.3)

"the skills sometimes are self-acquired meaning that some people have a natural apt to be good supervisors or fieldwork supervisors." (PHY11, para.5)

"Sometimes I have the feeling that for a supervisor to be good its only dependent on his character. He needs a natural way of doing it and will be part of his character that he is able to explain, able to communicate and able to act as a supervisor rather than being trained." (STUI, Student 5, para. 42)

This makes it more important for the managerial team to determine the people most suited for the job of supervisors and providing them with proper settings where they can carry out this duty in practice.

5.5 Advantages of Fieldwork Supervision

The objective of determining the perceptions of the main stakeholders of fieldwork supervision was accomplished by highlighting the advantages and disadvantages as perceived by the respondents. The main advantages displayed in Figure 4.4\(^5\) in the previous chapter are grouped together in the following table.

\(^5\) Figure 4.4, Page 53.
• Fieldwork supervision as an added skill
• Helping physiotherapists remain up to date with new knowledge and continuous learning
• Job/personal satisfaction
• Development of supervisory competence
• Investing in the future workforce
• Access to new knowledge
• As a source of reflective practice

Table 5.1. Advantages of fieldwork supervision

The following are some of the main quotes by the respondents:

"As regards advantages you are in a learning situation continuously. So, that helps improve your situation apart from the student situation." (PHY2, para.8)

"the advantages of being a fieldwork supervisor I would say would be that I think that it is always nice to teach students in a good way because at the end of the day pretty soon they are going to end up working with you and the worst thing you can have beside the bad student is a bad colleague to work with." (PHY8, para.10)

"clinical supervision does not only help the student but also helps the person providing the supervision himself because they have to be kept up to date and they have to make sure that what they are doing is evidence based." (EDU2, para.2)
One of the management issues of this study was the quality assurance of future physiotherapists. Similarly to Thomas et al., (2007), MAN2, EDU2 and PHY8 stated that an advantage of fieldwork supervision is investing in the future workforce. By providing good fieldwork supervision to students, one is investing in having better physiotherapists. This in turn will impact positively on employer's expectations of the quality of newly graduated physiotherapists. Hence the management must make sure that appropriate fieldwork supervision is carried out. Other reported benefits in the study by Thomas et al. (2007) included the development of employee skills. These were also complemented by the views of participants in this study who stated that fieldwork supervision aids physiotherapists remain up to date with new practices whilst developing supervisory competence.

When asked about the advantages of fieldwork supervision MAN1 and MAN3 had conflicting comments. MAN3 considered students as an advantage as they are an 'extra pair of hands'. This was backed by Paterson (1997) who stated that having students can actually increase a clinician's productivity with respect to patient care. However MAN1 stated that they should never be considered so. In fact this finding goes in line with what the majority of studies used in this study suggested (Cohn and Frum, 1988; Ladyhewsky and Barrie, 1996; Vogel et al., 2004; Ohman et al. 2005). Additionally, MAN3 referred to having students on the clinical setting as a huge source of stimulation for staff as this helps them keep in touch with new practices by having the perspective of a younger generation thus favouring lifelong learning. This is another important management issue that comes out of this study showing that learning is not confined only to the classroom but should take place throughout everyday practice and in a range of situations.

5.6 Disadvantages of Fieldwork Supervision

Despite considering fieldwork supervision as extremely important for the future workforce of the physiotherapy profession, the majority of the physiotherapists

---

6 Management issues highlighted in Chapter 1, page 5
involved in the study together with the Physiotherapy managers considered fieldwork supervision more as a disadvantage than an advantage. This suggests that the management needs to raise awareness, as was done by Neale (2003), on promoting the issue of fieldwork supervision and thus having more physiotherapists willing to supervise students. The main disadvantage was the fact that fieldwork supervision is very time consuming. MAN1 for example stated:

"our staff already has its problems sometimes being under staffed etc. Our staff sometimes find the students as a burden as they need time, be with them in what they do, explain, supervise and in the same time give them some pressure so that they are exposed to the real situation." (MAN1, para.2)

According to PHY1 and MAN3 the lack of time available to supervise students was not only the fault of having students assigned to them but also due to increased job responsibilities mainly due to the demands of the managed care environment such as larger caseloads, more documentation and more administrative duties. A similar response was achieved by Vogel et al. (2004) in their study with occupational therapy fieldwork supervisors and students on fieldwork rotations.

Students sometimes have their own caseload of patients which further limits the time available for the supervisor:

"So we end up seeing more patients without having been given adequate time within the time-table or setup to actually perform your duties as a supervisor." (PHY11, para.11)

PHY9 suggested that when work is delegated to students patient contact is decreased thus leading to decreased treatment standards. This further highlights the importance

---

7 Managed care in this text referring to a variety of techniques for influencing the clinical behavior of health care providers
of policies set in place by the management team in order to safeguard the standards of practice.

Finally lack of incentives such as financial remuneration for the extra workload incurred, was an issue that some physiotherapists perceived as a disadvantage of fieldwork supervision. PHY1, PHY8 and PHY10 suggested that providing an incentive is a means of keeping the staff happy even in times when the supervisors are forced to take on supervision of students. Parallel to the respondents in the study conducted by Currens and Bithell (2000), fieldwork supervisors considered students to be an added burden and the lack of incentives further cemented this view.

5.7 Current Practices in the Physiotherapy Profession

One of the objectives of this study was to determine whether the present practice is meeting the students' needs and needs of the profession. Whereas the members of the Education Institution were certain that appropriate supervision is being given to the students in the clinical setting, the students were not of the same idea. In fact the negative experiences which the students mentioned were far more abundant than the positive experiences. The following comment by Student 7 sums up what the majority of students believed:

"They just have knowledge on how to be a physiotherapist and not be a fieldwork supervisor." (STU2, Student 7, para. 11)

PHY4, PHY8 and PHY11 admitted that they don't have the skills to act as supervisors especially due to the fact that they are not the actual teachers of the students:

"I think the biggest problem we have with fieldwork supervising of students is that we are not the actual teachers of the students. So we don't know what is
being taught to the students; we don't know what to expect out of the students when they come on placement with us.” (PHY8, para.2)

“I feel that I am not carrying out fieldwork supervision to the best way I could.” (PHY4, para.2)

“Unfortunately the way things seem to have developed over the years, the supervising aspect of this fieldwork supervision which you are looking into has developed more into an aspect of teaching so you get the students coming to you and you end up having to teach them a lot of the skills which realistically they should have already had.” (PHY11, para.3)

All the Physiotherapy Managers interviewed as well as PHY12 mentioned that a course in fieldwork supervision was held a number of years ago in Malta however, this was not repeated. EDU2 pointed out that:

“At the moment the thinking of the Institute of Health Care is that the divisions should no longer carry out individual fieldwork supervision courses but there should be a combined one.” (EDU2, para.5)

EDU 2 did not give more information on the reason why such courses should be combined however such an issue is important in order to build a framework for the delivery of a fieldwork supervisor course using inter-professional learning. A combined course would allow common areas to be integrated and thus tapping into the real-life knowledge gained from the experience of different people from other professions.

Whatever the current practices, EDU 2 argued that the most important thing is that competencies are being met and quoted what an examiner from UK said recently:
“and I will quote ‘to conclude my experience as external examiner in 2008 is that the graduated physiotherapy students at the University of Malta have the competence needed to practice as physiotherapists in a safe, effective and efficient way in Malta as well as in other parts of Europe’.” (EDU2, para.14)

5.7.1 Elements that Make up a Positive Fieldwork Placement

Students look at their supervisors as a role model and having a positive fieldwork placement depends also on their supervisors.

“The way they behave, the way they explain, time, if they have enough time with you or they just leave you on your own and they don't know if you are doing the right thing or not.” (STUI, Student 9, para.13)

Student 5 also highlighted the fact that students need to be felt welcomed once on placements. This can be achieved through proper communication between the student and the supervisor and also the other members of staff.

Of particular importance to some students was the fact that clear guidelines are needed for a fieldwork placement to be positive. In fact, Students 1, 3 and 5 stated that by having good communication between the fieldwork supervisors and the Education Institution these guidelines can be developed and then passed on to the students. For the majority of students it was deemed very important to practice safely and to the required standards thus fulfilling the different expectations of the academic organization as well as those of future employers. Finally another element which according to some students (1, 4, 7, 8 & 10) can make up a positive fieldwork placement is the decrease in subjectivity when it comes to grading the students. Student 2 for example considered it very important to build up a good relationship as seen in the following quote:
"I think that if you are not on good terms with your supervisor you won't manage to have a positive leaning experience because even the feedback which is given to the institution is subjective and based on the supervisor's perception." (STU2, Student 5, para.5)

5.7.2 Negative Experiences/Practices

Lack of support and the fact that sometimes students are being left on their own in fieldwork placements was an experience that almost all students experienced at one time or another. Also the element of fear was a negative experience for Students 2 and 8 as they felt that they were being assessed and graded all the time. These students considered this element of being challenged as a negative experience on placements, contrary to the response of the students in the study by Clouder (2000). Clouder (2000) concluded that this was deemed useful by students and should be recognized as a way of encouraging reflection-in-action⁸.

Student 7 sensed that certain physiotherapists acting as supervisors were not motivated. She argued that this may be due to lack of incentives or more importantly because physiotherapists are being forced to act as fieldwork supervisors. In fact a particular physiotherapist stated that:

"......as until now I was kind of forced to supervise students and I was not doing it happily." (PHY4, para.6)

Financial motivation was something which was mentioned by various respondents especially by the physiotherapists interviewed as well as by the Physiotherapy managers. Surprisingly however financial motivation was also mentioned by some students and as Student 5 stated it can further improve the level of fieldwork supervision:

---

⁸ In the study by Clouder (2000) refers to carrying out reflective practice during treatments.
“Thinking from the physiotherapist point of view I can understand that apart of the patients they have to see they also have to take care of the student and demotivation comes in. By providing an incentive I think it improves the motivation and you have a student with you who gets proper supervision.” (STUI, Student 5, para.34)

Student 7 suggested that the management should tackle this issue seriously, by providing incentives such as remuneration to those volunteering in performing these duties. MAN3, however, stated that in her area it is a common practice that students are assigned to physiotherapists willing to supervise them:

“I would assign students only to those clinicians who are willing to take them on.” (MAN3, para.7)

This is possible in areas where managers are spoilt for choice in assigning students but not in areas where staff numbers are limited.

Since there are no clear guidelines of what fieldwork supervision is all about, Student 2 stated that work was occasionally dumped onto the students:

“And also sometimes, some physiotherapists just give you their work, you know...” (STUI, Student 2, para.16)

This goes against the Malta Association of Physiotherapy standards of practice which states that the “person delegating the work has a duty to ensure that the task is suitable to be delegated and the person accepting the delegated task has a duty to ensure they are competent to perform the task.” (Malta Association of Physiotherapy, 2007, p.13).
Sometimes physiotherapists felt unmotivated also due to the fact that the supervision and teaching of students was portrayed as their sole responsibility once the student started his fieldwork placements:

"A lot of the supervision of the students on the wards is being loaded on to the physiotherapists in the wards themselves and this is not fair because the students will end up losing in the long run." (PHY2, para.10)

Another negative practice mentioned by Student 3 was related to lack of involvement of physiotherapists in continued education thus what was being taught was not always evidence based. This is an important management issue as evidence based practices are very important in ensuring that the treatments performed are safe. Student 3, referring to a supervisor who had long been practicing as a physiotherapist, stated:

"for example I used to do evidence based techniques and the supervisor was not acquainted with them so maybe he commented that they were maybe unsafe or ineffective while in actual fact research showed that they were the most effective approaches" (STU2, Student 3, para.18)

EDU2 stated that with increased pressures and with lack of continuous education programmes (CPD) certain physiotherapists were depicted as making use of certain professional short cuts in the clinical field. He stated clinical reasoning is the way forward as it enables the clinician to take the best judged action in a specific context. Currently, according to Student 4:

"physiotherapists are trained though their experience with students. What can be improved is training them in clinical reasoning and urge them to use more evidence-based practices" (STUI, Student 4, para.44)

This compares to what Parsall and Bligh (cited in Chipchase et al. 2004) had suggested. Exposure-based education is based on the premise that if the students are
exposed to enough hours in a clinic they will eventually become competent. It is of utmost importance that the fieldwork supervisors help the students in pairing up current physiotherapy practices and emerging practices. Student 4 stated that this is at present lacking but can be achieved through proper training and the involvement of fieldwork supervisors in continuous education and evidence-based practice.

Student 7 however abstained in blaming fieldwork supervisors only, but blamed both the supervisors as well as to the Education Institution due to lack of communication:

"Sometimes unfortunately Physiotherapy practice tends to take place according to certain rule of thumb with certain shortcuts, certain techniques which are not scientifically proven, and that's not what is expected by the student in his final exams so more communication so that they are in congruence, the supervisor and the institution I think would be beneficial." (STU2, Student 7, para.9)

Finally the grading part of the fieldwork placement was also a negative experience for some students. This will be dealt with in Section 5.11.

5.8 Needs Felt in the Area of Fieldwork Supervision within the Physiotherapy Profession in Malta

The main needs felt by the different stakeholders who were interviewed were decreased workload for physiotherapists acting as supervisors, clear guidelines, better communication and training.

5.8.1 Decreased Workload

The need for fieldwork supervisors to have a decreased workload was voiced more by the students than by physiotherapists acting as fieldwork supervisors. This may hint at the perceived feeling that physiotherapists were not providing adequate attention to
the students under their care. The majority of physiotherapists admitted that with decreased workload they will be in a better position to provide better fieldwork supervision. Student 8 gave the reason why decreased workload can improve fieldwork supervision stating:

"Because he will be all the time dedicated towards the student and do not see you as an extra work but look at you as a positive experience for him as well." (STU1, Student 8, para.23)

Student 5 suggested that having a big workload may lead to the fieldwork supervisor not being present all the time with the student. This may be problematic as:

"Some patients don't like the fact that they are going to be treated by a student." (STU1, Student 5, para.26a)

"Its reasonable I think for patients themselves thinking that there is a graduated and experienced physiotherapist together with the student even if the student is treating." (STU1, Student 5, para.26b)

Improving patient satisfaction through providing quality treatments is another important managerial issue. Whilst it is important that the students have hands on practice in the clinical setting one must bear in mind that they are treating human beings who have the right of being provided with a proper treatment. Thus, having physiotherapists present on the scene with students is a necessity. Hence as Students 1 and 8 suggested it is important for the management to assign lighter workloads to physiotherapists carrying the duties of fieldwork supervisors.

5.8.2 Clear Guidelines

Another important issue highlighted as a need mostly by physiotherapists is the lack of proper guidelines. Respondents suggested that at present there are no clear
guidelines on what is needed to act as a fieldwork supervisor. Students also suggested that on their part they wonder what is expected of them while on placements. Student 1 highlighted the importance of such guidelines by stating:

"if you have a clinical supervisor who is always there with you who is in line with what you were taught in the Institute of Health Care and in what is done in actual placement I think it would be easier on us and easier on everyone." (STU1, Student 5, para. 27)

whilst Student 1 suggested that apart from clear guidelines, training is needed to achieve this goal:

"also I don't think that the physiotherapists, at least most of them that I have experienced, actually know the actual goals and what to actually watch out as regards supervision so I think in that case training or at least a writing down of guidelines or of what to actually look out for is in place." (STU1, Student 1, para. 40)

Additionally, PHY 4 suggested that the lack of proper guidelines may be mostly due to lack of communication between all parts involved. This is consistent with the opinion of Strohschein et al. (2002) when they stated that a consistent and effective approach to clinical education requires a guiding philosophy that is clearly communicated, understood, and embraced by all the groups and the individuals involved in the clinical education process. From a managerial aspect in the absence of guidelines, the present system cannot be monitored and the implementation of policies, when these are developed, seems a difficult or rather impossible task to perform.
5.8.3 Communication

Lack of communication between clinicians and the Education Institution was a topic which emerged almost in every interview with the physiotherapists and the Physiotherapy managers. Some students (1, 2, 4, 5 & 11) also reported that there is lack of communication between the fieldwork supervisors and the Education Institution.

Student 5 suggested that the members of the Education Institution need to be present more often on fieldwork placements:

"I think that the lecturers should come more often at the placement because sometimes they only come on the last day of the placement. And they don't participate in the grade as well. They should come on a frequent basis say once a week and they should participate when the physiotherapist acting as a supervisor is grading you." (STU1, Student 5, para.28b)

According to Student 11 this is considered important mostly due to the fact that no clear guidelines are present:

"since there are not any previous criteria it usually happens that when you have your exam with a university tutor what was studied theoretically and what you actually did on your clinical placements would differ so the examiner would maybe disagree with the techniques you would use in the exam so there should be more communication between the institution, the supervisors and the students." (STU2, Student 11, para.17)

Better communication between the clinicians and the Education Institution would assist in bridging the gap between theory and practice. Currently in Malta this transition from the academic class to the real world is hindered by the lack of communication between the academic department and the clinical setting. Similar to
the study of Ohman et al., (2005), there is a lack of effective co-operation regarding their complementary tasks. The issue of liaison of the clinicians with the Education Institution will be examined separately in section 5.12.

5.8.4 Training

Nine out of ten students interviewed suggested that physiotherapists are not trained to act as fieldwork supervisors. Even the physiotherapists themselves voiced concern that they were not happy with the current fieldwork supervision they were providing. This corresponds with another study performed in Malta in the Occupational Therapy field by Bonello (1998) where it was suggested that educational programs were needed to prepare supervisors for the dual role of meeting market demands for service delivery and for providing quality placement experiences for the next generation of health professionals. All the three Physiotherapy Managers stated that training was provided in the past and would definitely be useful if it had to be re-introduced.

Out of the twelve physiotherapists interviewed eleven suggested that training was required in order to provide fieldwork supervision. This was a straightforward answer to the aim for which this study was carried out. The only respondent who did not give a definite answer was PHY10 who suggested that:

"Training will create a shortcut to trying to regain clinical skills, supervisory skills through trial and error. It would help focus the skills needed so that you would have a more effective outcome with your students." (PHY10, para.5)

However, this respondent was still willing to undergo training if this was to be provided in order to provide supervision in a standardized and consistent way. Only PHY8 was not ready to undergo training in fieldwork supervision mainly because he did not wish to act as a fieldwork supervisor. The fact that almost all the physiotherapists interviewed were willing to undergo training in fieldwork

---

9 Figure 4.10, Page 59.
supervision is a positive aspect that can be drawn out of this study showing that if the management will take into account the recommendations of this study and provide training there will surely be a positive response.

Both the members of the Education Institution were in favour of training the physiotherapists in fieldwork supervision for various reasons. EDU1 in particular, earnestly stated that there was a need to train physiotherapists acting as fieldwork supervisors, emphasizing the statement “training the trainers” a few times during the interview:

“The main way of improving fieldwork supervision is by training the trainers which seem to be buzz word nowadays. I agree totally with that. The students nowadays are becoming more demanding; course requirements are becoming more demanding.” (EDU1, para.4)

“a clinical supervisor course or as you call it fieldwork supervision course will always help. Why? Because it brings people together, you can get them to look out for the same things, how to communicate with students, how to negotiate a problem, so yes there is a need” (EDU2, para.5)

MAN1 suggested that if training is to be introduced it has to be the Education Institution’s responsibility to give some sort of training:

“I think it is the Education Institution’s responsibility to give supervisors some sort of training. This has happened in the past and I must say it was a good start and we had done an assignment. I think it has been around twelve years ago if I am not mistaken. However, no follow up was done since then” (MAN1, para.5)

However, PHY12 was against the fact that University lecturers will provide the necessary training stating that they lack hands on practice when it comes to the
clinical scene. Student 2 argued that further to training, supervisors need to be Senior physiotherapists or higher grades with a number of years of experience. Since currently in the Physiotherapy profession there are no guidelines of who should act as supervisors, students may find themselves observing newly graduated physiotherapists who lack the necessary experience to act as supervisors. This poses another recommendation to management in that it is important to identify the persons responsible in providing fieldwork supervision in order to keep good standards of practice.

A number of participants came out with practical examples of how training in fieldwork supervision can be carried out. However, this is something which needs to be studied further in order to understand the implications and consequences of a particular form of training to be held. Some students (4, 8 & 9) for example suggested some sort of academic training:

"There is a need of something academic basically that a physiotherapist can say that he is qualified to act as a fieldwork supervisor and can do it well." (STU1, Student 4, para.48)

"I think that after four years to get your degree there should be a Diploma in Clinical Supervision like there is abroad because these for example... help you in the clinical reasoning process, and tell you what your goals are" (STU1, Student 8, para.37)

"I think there should be a diploma specifically to become a supervisor and I think there should be a trained supervisor in every placement." (STU1, Student 9, para.43)

Apart from post-graduate training in fieldwork supervision Student 10 suggested that this subject can be incorporated in the course curriculum to become a physiotherapist. This is another important management issue as by allocating a small part of the
curriculum specifically to training in fieldwork supervision the importance of fieldwork supervision is instilled into new graduates who may take up this subject as a post-graduate study. Neale (2003) had one way of raising awareness about the issue of fieldwork supervision by only classifying the advantages. This could be taken a step forward by incorporating it into the course curriculum so that newly graduates understood the importance of fieldwork supervision for the future Physiotherapy workforce.

The issue of courses or some sort of training was quite common in the responses by the physiotherapists with PHY6 stating that:

"they should undergo training in the form of lectures which are updated regularly even 1 day courses." (PHY6, para.5)

EDU2 revealed that the Institute of Health Care is in the process of creating a common fieldwork supervision course for all health professions. However, to date this did not materialize and the Physiotherapy profession was rethinking of starting the course again.

Student 5 suggested that training should be carried out on a voluntary basis and then the Human Resource Department could give monetary allowance to those acting as a fieldwork supervisor with the necessary training. This suggests that fieldwork supervision is considered as a secondary commitment as was perceived by Currens and Bithell (2000) and should be paid for. However, unless the job description of Physiotherapy is updated this cannot take place, as supervising students is written down in the job description\textsuperscript{10} of Senior Physiotherapists and Assistant Principal Physiotherapists.

\textsuperscript{10} Physiotherapy job descriptions can be accessed at the Physiotherapy Department at Mater Dei Hospital.
Training would be beneficial to both the students as well as to the supervisors themselves:

"Maybe for some supervisors it just comes natural to be good supervisors and to provide good feedback, understand the needs of the student etc. But obviously if there would be training offered to provide better supervisors it would be beneficial both for the student and the supervisor" (STU2, Student 11, para.12)

Despite all the other students' responses in favour of training, Student 2 argued that training is not that essential if good communication is in place. He stated:

"I don't think that physiotherapists are trained to do this job but I don't think there should be specifically a course to train them in fieldwork supervision. I think that communication with the Institute of Health Care is more important than the course itself." (STU1, Student 2, para.45)

5.9 Subjects to be Included in Training

Despite some physiotherapists having followed a course in fieldwork supervision in the past, those who participated did not have positive comments about it. PHY12 for example stated that it was a short course and no follow up was done. Considering it was held more than 8 years ago PHY12 stated that new courses were needed in fieldwork supervision. MAN3 also mentioned a course which was done in the past. However, she stated that this was not practical and gave some ideas of what should be tackled:

"If you do a training needs analysis and you interview physiotherapists I think they need something more practical like how to tackle behaviours of students, attitudes of students, how to tackle students who are not willing to take on board what you guide them on and what you teach them. Those practical
aspects are what clinicians need more than the theory because the theory they know already.” (MAN3, para.8)

The main subjects that need to be included in training are presented in Figure 4.9 in Chapter 4. For example the issue of grading is one of the subjects that need to be included in training as mentioned by the students and some of the physiotherapists:

“I think the main thing we need to be informed about is what assessment tools if any are being used by students or being taught to them so that we can follow onto those tools.” (PHY8, para.8)

The main topic which most physiotherapists (1, 3, 5, 8, 9 & 11) and Physiotherapy Managers (1, 2 & 3) deemed necessary to be included in training was how to deal with students. These respondents perceived that proper training was needed in order to be able to give appropriate feedback and support as not all students behaved the same and their learning skills were different. Despite not linking this topic with training, Christie et al. (cited in Mackenzie et al. 2001) also suggested that supervisors need organizational skills, the ability to give appropriate feedback and offer support, effective communication skills, the ability to develop sound working relationships, and the ability to maintain a positive learning environment.

MAN3 gave particular attention to dealing with unsuccessful students as in her opinion this requires additional skill. Moreover, as one of the major disadvantages of fieldwork supervision was that it was time consuming, numerous participants stated that they would include time management as one of the subjects in fieldwork supervision training.

The subjects that need to be included in fieldwork supervision training is a topic that needs to be studied separately hence it is a recommendation for future research once it is determined that there is a need for training in fieldwork supervision.

---

11 Figure 4.9, Page 58.
5.10 Further Research in the Area of Fieldwork Supervision

Apart from the subjects which could be included if training for fieldwork supervisors was provided some respondents also highlighted areas of fieldwork supervision that needed to be researched. These included topics already mentioned in this chapter, such as the willingness of some of the supervisors to take on students, the theory-practice gap as well as the amount of time that should be devoted to fieldwork supervision. Additionally, considering that due to staff shortages decreasing the workloads of physiotherapists acting as supervisors seems an unattainable task, PHY6 suggested that other models of fieldwork supervision should be researched:

"future research should focus on new ways of improving fieldwork supervision for example advantages of other forms of supervision over the present one-to-one supervision." (PHY6, para.7)

Having a student was acknowledged to be stressful by some of those involved in fieldwork supervision; concurrently respondent EDU2 maintained that research on the stress involved in fieldwork supervision would shed light on a new aspect of the subject under study. The issue of stress is an important managerial issue as staff may end up with burnout and in turn avail themselves of more sick leave. Whilst students maintained that fieldwork placements provided them with positive learning experiences, respondent EDU2 sustained that research on the learning process that occurred during fieldwork would broaden the knowledge on the benefits of physiotherapy students in attending fieldwork placements.

5.11 Grading the Students

The marking scheme and student expectations were other important issues highlighted by most students and physiotherapists in this study. Apart from the teaching role mentioned previously fieldwork supervisors had the important task of
evaluating the students. This evaluative role was also considered important by the majority of nursing students studied in a study by Sharif and Masoumi (2005).

Objectivity in assessing students during fieldwork supervision was something which the Physiotherapy students would like to see more in their fieldwork placements. Student 1 stated that what was currently used was an assessment sheet which was common to all fieldwork placements instead of particular assessment guidelines for each respective placement. Since every placement is different, according to Student 5 new ways should be introduced so that the grading is performed according to each and every specific placement.

Student 4 stated that increased subjectivity especially in grading may be the fault of both the students as well as the supervisors if too much social comfort takes place:

“The grade varies with how much the physiotherapist acting as a supervisor likes you. So if they like you on a personal level they are going to tell you that you are going to do well. If on the other hand they don’t like you for some reason or another you are not going to do well even if you do everything by the book.” (STU1, Student 4, para.22)

This same student even mentioned a placement where she was not even graded by her fieldwork supervisor stating that she was assigned to a particular team on a particular placement with no clear guidelines who was her fieldwork supervisor or what was expected of her during the placement:

“What I was disappointed by was in one placement where actually I was graded by a person who was not supervising me.” (STU1, Student 4, para.18b)

Physiotherapists 4 and 8 felt that they should receive information about the grading process on a continuous basis from the Education Institution including up-to-date evaluation tools to be used.
PHY8, PHY10 and MAN3 suggested that fieldwork supervisors should be included in the final assessment of students. This requires better communication with the Education Institution which according to the responses of this study seems lacking. PHY10 and EDU1 suggested that for physiotherapists to be involved in the final grading of students they need further training:

"we are given the responsibility to take care and supervise students however we are not allowed then to mark or grade our students accordingly and have an influence on the final mark especially so in the absence of clinical educators or better the Institute of Health Care tutors which should be there to see how much the student has absorbed from that placement. This would need further training as regards grading." (PHY10, para.9)

"So when a student actually is on fieldwork the student wants that the clinician or supervisor grades him because he or she would be in a better position to do that. What might be happening is that the clinician feels that he or she is not competent or not trained enough to be able to judge that." (EDU1, para.7)

Student 8 suggested that students should have the facility to grade their supervisors by developing an assessment sheet where the students can comment on the level of supervision they were given on that particular placement. In fact the University is working on this whereby students will be able to provide feedback on their assessors. This can be considered the first step in monitoring the present fieldwork supervision that is being carried out.

5.12 Liaison with the Education Institution

Finally another important issue connected to the objective of identifying current practices in Malta and needs to be tackled further in future research, is the liaison of the physiotherapists acting as fieldwork supervisors with the members of the
Education Institution. The results of this study are comparable to the workshop carried out by MacKenzie et al. (2001) where fieldwork supervisors described the feeling of being isolated from university staff during times of difficulty. A high number of physiotherapists (2, 3, 5, 6, 9 & 12) depicted lack of communication as coming mostly from the educational establishment rather than from the side of the fieldwork supervisors or physiotherapists on the clinical field. EDU1 acknowledged this issue by stating:

"by making sure that there is open communication between the education establishment and the clinical area." (EDU1, para.7b)

and also admitting that without the input of the fieldwork supervisors there will be a part of the course which is lacking:

"I think in any of the medical courses or health courses clinical supervision or clinical fieldwork lets put it that way is of high importance. I would say that it comes at equal importance with the academic part of the course. And at the same way the education establishment needs the clinical supervisors." (EDU1, para.9)

Some students (1, 2, 7 & 9) also perceived that communication between the clinicians and members of University is lacking with Student 4 adding that responsibility on placements is transferred to fieldwork supervisors:

"It is unfair that all responsibility is given to the physiotherapists. Hence communication is the most important thing between the physiotherapists and the lecturers" (STU1, Student 4, para.50)

PHY9 argued that by proper communication weak areas are identified and students can be helped even more:
"I believe that at the moment there is very little input coming, communication coming between the actual clinicians that are acting as supervisors over here in the health service and the actual Institute that is there to teach the students. I believe that if there is more communication between both the lectures from one side so giving us supervisors feedback of the outcome of the students in their exams, what they are lacking and where we could help them improve on this aspect that would give a better result at the end of the day to the students and in so doing getting a better physiotherapist at the end of the day." (PHY9, para.9)

Vogel et al. (2004) also suggested that both the fieldwork supervisors, as well as the educational body, can help facilitate one of the problems identified by students, which is the process of transition of students from the classroom to the clinical scene. This can be brought about by recognizing student anxiety about the transition, and then teaching and supporting healthy coping strategies that will serve to reduce students' stress. Ohman et al. (2005) studying the Physiotherapy profession yielded similar ideas on the communication between the fieldwork supervisors and the Education Institution. They stated that the transition from the class to the clinical setting is not helped by the fact that some of the relations between the academic departments and the clinical settings are problematic, as there is a lack of effective co-operation regarding their complementary tasks. In more general terms, and with similar responses between this study and that by Ohman et al. (2005) was the fact that the fieldwork supervisors perceive academic educators to be rather old-fashioned in terms of hands-on skills and too modern in terms of theory development. This shows the importance of continuous professional development as a management issue in order to have staff which is up-to-date with present knowledge.

Another physiotherapist acting as a fieldwork supervisor, whilst discussing the issue of continuous professional development with a colleague, identified the importance of being on the same line of thought with the University when teaching students:
"We need updates on new techniques and more input from the Institute of Health Care when it comes to supervising students. I was challenged today on an orthopaedic issue. We need to be on the same line with the University when it comes to teaching students."

(Field note 7)

The input required from the side of the Education Institution includes proper information on student progress throughout the course, the subject areas which were covered in the curriculum and clear set guidelines on what is to be taught and assessed on placements. In so doing as PHY8 stated that they will be contributing to providing better physiotherapists at the end of the day. This issue and other management recommendations will be discussed in Chapter 6.

5.13 Methodological Critique and Study Limitations

Throughout this study three types of data collection tools were used namely interviews, reflective diary and a review of the available literature. This enabled me to perform triangulation of data which increased the credibility and validity of the results. Despite taking into consideration all the necessary precautions during the research process, I could not prevent certain aspects in the process of undertaking the study. The following are the main limitations of the study:

- Since the study was carried out specifically in the acute setting at Mater Dei Hospital, the results are valid for the sample under study and cannot be generalized to all the Physiotherapy profession in Malta. Had I provided details about the setting the readers would have been able to assess whether the results could be applicable elsewhere. Additionally, this is my interpretation of results. Readers may suggest their own interpretations of the data collected.
Another limitation to the methods used was that students interviewed were involved in only one focus group at the end of their course. The ideal situation would have been to involve students in focus groups after each single placement in order to get clearer ideas and experiences of their clinical placements.

The issue of my ‘insiderness’ can also be considered a limitation to this study. Since I was the only person carrying out the interviews, transcribing the data and analyzing the interview transcripts some sort of bias in this process especially when deciding what was relevant might have been present. I might not have given sufficient attention to issues that I may have taken for granted. However, the ‘insider’ in me was a source of evidence that informed the study. I used this issue for the best advantage and tried to stay away from biases.

Another limitation was that the literature search revealed that little qualitative work has been done in studying fieldwork supervision especially in Malta particularly in the field of Physiotherapy.

5.14 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the findings of this study whilst trying to fulfil the objectives set out at the outset of this study. Particular management issues were drawn out in due course. A brief overview of the main findings will be presented in the last chapter together with recommendations arising directly from this study.
CHAPTER 6

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION
Chapter 6 Recommendations and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the main findings which were analysed and discussed in Chapter 5 as well as the ensuing recommendations of the study.

6.2 Research Findings

The following is a brief overview of the main findings which were analysed and discussed in Chapter 5. As stated in the limitations section, this is my interpretation of results. Readers may suggest their own interpretations of the data collected.

- **Current practices in the area of fieldwork supervision within the Physiotherapy profession in Malta**

  The majority of respondents suggested that the current practices relating to fieldwork supervision need to be improved in some way or another. The students in particular raised concerns that at present what is taught is not always evidence-based and on some occasions they are not being given the necessary attention and time by physiotherapists acting as fieldwork supervisors.

- **Lifelong learning**

  The results concluded that the issue of lifelong learning was directly linked with the issue of enhancing the effectiveness and quality of service delivery in Physiotherapy services in Malta. By incorporating the best research evidence, clinicians acting as supervisors are able to give up-to-date information to the students. This, added to their expertise, will provide students with an environment where they can learn and perform safe practices.
• **Need for training in fieldwork supervision**

The study established a consensus amongst the different stakeholders in the field, on the issue of training in fieldwork supervision. Had a course been available, a high number of physiotherapists would be willing to undergo training, resulting in the availability of a good number of trained fieldwork supervisors.

• **Guidelines and Standards of Practice**

The study established the need of proper guidelines, which ultimately lead to policies regarding standards of practice for healthcare professionals to adhere to. For these to be implemented, communication between different stakeholders is necessary to reach the same goals in improving the profession.

• **Communication**

The findings suggested that communication between the clinicians and the Education Institution is lacking. Respondents stated that this is essential in helping the students overcome the difficulties encountered due to the theory-practice gap. As clinicians need to involve themselves more in continuous professional development, the members of the Education Institution, on their part, need to be present more on clinical placements as their practical hands-on was deemed lacking.

### 6.3 Recommendations

Based on the emerging issues just described above the following are recommendations to the Management as well as recommendations for future research. This is not an exhaustive list of recommendations and the data may suggest other recommendations relevant to fieldwork supervision beyond the Maltese health system.

#### 6.3.1 Recommendations to Management

- Students are to be provided with a positive learning experience which is dependent on a number of factors including having trained fieldwork
supervisors. The correlation of a positive fieldwork experience and the impact that this has on the roots of novice physiotherapists is not to be dismissed. Thus it is imperative that from a managerial perspective, investment in training fieldwork supervisors and in the area of fieldwork education in general would mean or lead to an investment in the future workforce within the Physiotherapy profession in Malta.

- It is crucial that Physiotherapy Managers promote a culture of support for practice-based learning within their departments and involve the whole team in the process. This will lead to a continuous improvement of patient care based on constant self-evaluation and life-long learning.

- On a larger framework or perspective this same concept of investing in fieldwork education can be broadened to other healthcare professionals with the aim of establishing a better quality of care with a better equipped workforce.

- Clear guidelines need to be in place for both the staff and the students to adhere to. These guidelines include, clearly defining the role of the fieldwork supervisors and that of the students as well as improved grading systems. The introduction of the Clinical Handbook in December 2008 was a good step in the right direction. Grading systems or assessments should aim at providing feedback to students, recording and monitoring students’ progress, certification of skills and abilities and determining the extent to which the learning objectives are achieved. For these objectives to be met the fieldwork supervisors should have clear guidelines about the Physiotherapy curriculum and the expectations related to the year of the course. The co-ordinator of the Physiotherapy course and other members of the Education Institution in collaboration with the current physiotherapists involved in fieldwork supervision should work together to formulate clinical assessments relating to the different competencies to be achieved in each year of the Physiotherapy course.

- Communication between the Education Institution and the clinical setting is another essential element which needs to be improved. Apart from the lack of
training, decreased communication was the second most frequent factor which fieldwork supervisors attributed their stress levels and concerns to. This can be brought about by holding regular meetings between the Education Institution and the clinicians, or else if this proves time consuming the use of information technology in the form of emails etc may be considered. In so doing teamwork is improved and the whole profession will benefit.

- Identifying specific physiotherapists who have undergone training in fieldwork supervision may prove beneficial to management as they can assign students only to them whilst decreasing their clinical workload.

- Clear guidelines on the structural formulation and commencement of a course for physiotherapists to become fieldwork supervisors should be achieved via close collaboration between accredited schools abroad and the Academic Institution (IHC physiotherapy course co-ordinator) thus the course would be recognized by the University of Malta.

- European Social Funds (ESF) can be accessed and people interested in the field of fieldwork supervision should have the opportunity to have hands on experience within a structure that portrays the ideal standards of fieldwork supervision abroad. Having gained such a valuable first hand experience these people should have the opportunity to put into practice a recognized course on fieldwork supervision.

- The Malta Association of Physiotherapy should be engaged in the process of developing a course in fieldwork supervision, thus it would also be acknowledged by this body whose primary mission statement is “to maintain and upgrade standards of physiotherapy according to international standards” and “to voice opinions on Physiotherapy related issues” (Malta Association of Physiotherapists, n.d.).

6.3.2 Recommendations for Future Research

- A similar study can be done in the future with the involvement of physiotherapists and Management working in different facilities around Malta
and Gozo. Such a study would shed a light on the broader aspect of fieldwork supervision within the Physiotherapy profession in Malta.

- Other areas related to fieldwork supervision such as the theory-practice gap, willingness to take the role of fieldwork supervisors, special skills required, time allocated to fieldwork supervision, grading the students and stress levels in physiotherapists can also be studied. The benefits of such studies will be the overall improvement of fieldwork supervision whilst still providing proper patient care.

- Since in this study it was established that there is a need for training in fieldwork supervision a new study in order to determine what subjects need to be tackled in such training is of the utmost importance.

- Determining whether other models of fieldwork supervision can be adapted.

- Additionally the same study can be replicated once the above recommendations for management are implemented, in order to determine whether these recommendations did in fact have a positive effect upon the level of fieldwork supervision in Malta.

6.4 Conclusion

This study was the first of its kind in the field of Physiotherapy in Malta. The dissertation is presented in such a way as to encourage physiotherapists in Malta to examine their practice, make evaluations and consider possible changes and transformations for improvements in current practices, thus ensuring better health service delivery for patients' needs. It raised issues which were not expected to be studied such as grading the students and the importance of communication between all stakeholders involved. The findings state clearly that there is a consensus amongst the respondents of this study to see the profession strive forward.

Investing in fieldwork supervision ensures proficient novice physiotherapists. The Physiotherapy profession can no longer allow fieldwork supervisors to develop skills to supervise, teach and evaluate students on a trial-and-error basis. By allocating
resources for introducing continuing education materials to be used in developing these skills, the profession will be acknowledging its longstanding espoused commitment to fieldwork. Within this framework, fieldwork experiences are fundamental to the way in which students of Physiotherapy are socialized into practicing professionals.
REFERENCE LIST
Reference List


APPENDIX 1

MAIN STUDIES REVIEWED
Appendix 1. Overview of the main studies referred to in this study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date &amp; Author</th>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Strengths and Limitations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Casares et al. 2003</td>
<td>To investigate how clinical fieldwork educators and academic fieldwork coordinators view the impact of the changing health care environment on student fieldwork education, current practice, and future of the profession</td>
<td>48-item questionnaire</td>
<td>125 occupational therapy fieldwork educators and coordinators</td>
<td>There were no statistically significant differences between clinical fieldwork educators and academic fieldwork coordinators regarding the impact of the regulatory changes in the health care system on the occupational therapy employment setting.</td>
<td>One restraint on interpretation involves the higher percentage of clinical fieldwork educators (42%) who did not respond to the questionnaire compared with the academic fieldwork coordinators who did not respond (15%). Specific reasons for this higher percentage of fieldwork educators is not known, and it is unclear whether or not some systematic bias may have influenced the results. The overall response rate (62.4%) obtained is an adequate return rate for both groups. Another limitation of the study is that because the sample was restricted to the southeastern United States, generalization of the findings to other geographic locations may not be warranted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currens et al. 2000</td>
<td>To identify and address attitudinal and organizational barriers to increased undergraduate clinical placements in one region.</td>
<td>Qualitative research design using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.</td>
<td>Service managers (5 pairs), clinical educators (5 pairs), recent graduates working in the NHS and 3rd year physiotherapy</td>
<td>Clinical education as a core role of professional physiotherapists was agreed in principle but found to be conditional and a secondary role in practice.</td>
<td>Data analysis made it possible to explore many issues which underpin clinical education. The numbers of direct informants in this study was small.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ehrenberg et al. 2007</strong></td>
<td><strong>To describe nursing students' and their preceptors' experiences of problem-based learning and a new model for supervision in clinical education.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Developmental project using interviews and questionnaires.</strong></td>
<td><strong>All students (n=45) in the 2nd year of their 3-year nursing program. 30 nurse preceptors and 4 head preceptors at medical, surgical and orthopaedic hospital units at 4 Swedish hospitals.</strong></td>
<td><strong>The possibility for supervised reflection was perceived as positive by both students and preceptors, although it sometimes was difficult for preceptors to set aside time. Research-based knowledge was rarely used in clinical teaching.</strong></td>
<td><strong>All the students took part and the students' experiences and background varied.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MacDonald et al. 2002</strong></td>
<td><strong>To describe the pattern of productivity and client satisfaction before, during, and after physical therapy student placements.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Productivity was collected using Workload Measurement System statistics and client satisfaction data were collected using the Client Satisfaction Questionnaire (©CSQ-8).</strong></td>
<td><strong>422 clients, 6 participating supervisory PTs and 5 consenting students.</strong></td>
<td><strong>No differences were found in productivity and client satisfaction. The personality and attributes of the service provider were the most favourable aspects of the services.</strong></td>
<td><strong>The small sample size is the single largest limitation of this study.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ohman et al. 2005</strong></td>
<td><strong>To study perceptions of professional role, education and the status of the profession among clinical students.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Focus group discussions</strong></td>
<td><strong>15 supervisors attached to four universities in Sweden</strong></td>
<td><strong>The contact with students and their updated knowledge base were the most positive aspects of being clinical supervisors. To</strong></td>
<td><strong>The use of three researchers from the fields of sociology, public health and education (triangulation) helped improve trustworthiness of the findings of the study.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paterson, 1997</td>
<td>To assess the clinician productivity with and without students</td>
<td>Self-controlled study using the Hospital Workload Measurement System (WMS)</td>
<td>All OT clinicians employed at two CAOT-accredited teaching hospitals from April 1990 through 1993.</td>
<td>Combining both institutions, no significant difference was seen in time use for direct patient care between when clinicians did and whey they did not have students.</td>
<td>With a larger sample, it is expected that students would actually increase time spent by a clinician on direct patient care and either make no difference or negligibly increase time spent on indirect patient care. Recording by clinicians is subjective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Reid et al., 2001 | To identify the strategies used by occupational therapy fieldwork educators to evaluate their own supervisory skills. To examine occupational therapy fieldwork educators' understanding of self-evaluation. To determine the strategies used to assess their own skills as a fieldwork educator | Cross-sectional, descriptive survey design. Data were collected through the use of self-administered postal questionnaires. | 119 fieldwork educators were realized, from which a random sample of 100 fieldwork educators was obtained. | 67 (100%) of the respondents stated that they encouraged students they supervised to use self-evaluation strategies while on placement. 59 (88.1%) stated that they used self-evaluation strategies to assess their own skills as a fieldwork | The assessment of understanding and attitude in any study is problematic. Interviews would have removed the anonymity of this study and may have discouraged frankness from the subjects. When using postal questionnaires, there is no guarantee that the people to whom the questionnaires are addressed are the actual respondents. The 74.5% response rate shows that the respondents found the questionnaire relatively easy to complete. The differences noted between the respondents' understanding and used of self-evaluation could have been a testing effect, resulting from the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sharif et al. 2005</td>
<td>Focus group analysis. 90 baccalaureate nursing students at Shiraz University of Medical Sciences randomly selected from 200 students</td>
<td>From the students' point of view, 'initial clinical anxiety', 'theory-practice gap', 'clinical supervision', 'professional role', were considered as important factors in clinical experience.</td>
<td>Most of the students were females (94%). This study investigated the experiences of student nurses only. Other health professional students' perspectives might be different.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas et al. 2007</td>
<td>Online, purpose-designed questionnaire. 328 potential participants were sourced from the occupational therapy fieldwork coordinators' databases at The University of Queensland</td>
<td>132 surveys were completed showing a strong link between supervision and later recruitment of fieldwork students, suggesting that supervision of students is of considerable advantage to the host organisations in the recruitment of appropriately prepared employees.</td>
<td>The study canvassed the views of a large number of occupational therapy supervisors (N=132). Survey was sent to people already known to fieldwork coordinators at two different universities, a degree of selection bias existed. The extent to which the participants were representative of the profession as a whole cannot be assumed. The survey design, and its distribution via email, resulted in an estimated response rate of 42%; however, it is not known how many potential participants the email finally reached.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vogel et al. 2004</td>
<td>To learn if fieldwork supervisors have greater expectations of students beginning Level II fieldwork compared to the previous 5yrs and how these compared to student expectations.</td>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>81 fieldwork supervisors and 29 students doing second fieldwork rotations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2A

Interview Questions – Physiotherapists acting as supervisors

1. How would you define fieldwork supervision?

2. Do you feel that you have to act as a fieldwork supervisor without the appropriate training?

3. What skills do you think are the skills required to act as a fieldwork supervisor?

4. Do you think that you have the necessary skills required to be a fieldwork supervisor?

5. Do you think that training is required to help clinicians obtain the necessary skills to become fieldwork supervisors?

6. Would you be prepared to undergo training in fieldwork supervision?

7. What subjects/curricula do you think should be included in a course for physiotherapists in supervisor training?

8. What are the advantages and disadvantages of being a fieldwork supervisor?
Appendix 2B

Interview Questions – Managerial level in Physiotherapy

1. How would you define fieldwork supervision?

2. How does student supervision relate to service provision within the physiotherapy profession?

3. Does fieldwork supervision help or hinder the physiotherapy practice?

4. Do you think that appropriate student supervision is being carried out?

5. If not, how may fieldwork supervision be improved?

6. If training was to be provided what topics do you think are the most important to be tackled?
Appendix 2C

Interview Questions – Education Institution

1. How would you define fieldwork supervision?

2. In what ways can fieldwork supervision help students to become competent clinicians?

3. Do you think that appropriate student supervision on clinical placements is being carried out?

4. How can fieldwork supervision be improved?

5. What areas of supervision should be researched and why?

6. Do you think the academic aspect covered in the course is sufficient to prepare the students to meet the challenges of the clinical placements?
Appendix 2D

Focus Group discussion with students – interview guide questions

1. How do you define fieldwork supervision?

2. What are the necessary elements that make up a positive fieldwork placement?

3. Do you think that you are being provided with a positive learning experience during placements? Why? Explain further.

4. What do you think can be improved in order to make placements a better learning experience?

5. Do you think that physiotherapists are well trained in providing fieldwork supervision?

6. Should they have further training and in what areas?
APPENDIX 3

INFORMATION LETTERS AND CONSENT FORMS
Information Sheet (Physiotherapists)

‘Rockcliffe’
Guze Ellul Mercer Str,
Nadur, Gozo.
NDR 104.

Date: ____________________

Dear: ____________________

I am Shawn Meilak a physiotherapist currently reading for a Master’s degree in Health Services Management organised by the University of Malta. I am carrying out a research study entitled ‘A needs assessment for training physiotherapists in fieldwork supervision’.

In the course of the study I would like to seek your opinion regarding the current practices related to fieldwork supervision of students as adopted by physiotherapists and how and if these need to be improved. Your opinion is important in evaluating the experiences that clinical staff might have.

It will be greatly appreciated if you could spare the time to participate in an interview related to the area of study. All the information obtained will be treated in strict confidence and none of the participants will be individually identified in the resultant study.

You are free to choose not to participate in the study or to change your mind about participating in the study on the day of the interview, which will be set up at your convenience. You are also entirely free to terminate your participation at any time or to decline to answer certain questions. This will not have any effect on your professional and clinical responsibilities.

I intend to use a tape recorder during the interviews, and will need your consent (form attached) to record the interview should you decide to participate in the study. The recording will be used for the sole purpose of the study and your name and identity will not be revealed. The tape will not be made available to any other person.
The data collected will be coded so that it cannot be linked to your name. Your identity will not be revealed during the course of study or after. All the raw data collected will be stored in a secure place and will not be shared with any person other than, with your permission, the supervisor of my study. Data collected will be destroyed after successful completion of the study.

Whilst hoping that you will be able to participate in this study, I look forward to discussing this matter with you soon. I can be contacted at work on 25456600 or at home on 27859930 or on mobile number 99859930. I would like to thank you in anticipation for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Shawn Meilak
CONSENT FORM
(Physiotherapists)

A needs assessment for training physiotherapists in fieldwork supervision.

Code Number: ________________

I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet.

I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving reason during the course of the study without any effect on my professional and clinical responsibilities.

I have no objection to the use of the tape recorder, as I know that my identity will not be revealed and that the raw data will be kept in a secure place and destroyed on successful completion of the study.

I agree to participate in the above study.

__________________________  ___________________  ___________________
Name (Respondent)          Date                 Signature

__________________________  ___________________  ___________________
Researcher                  Date                   Signature

Form to be filled in DUPLICATE: 1 copy for Respondent and 1 copy for Researcher
Information Sheet (Physiotherapy Managers)

‘Rockcliffe’
Guze Ellul Mercer Str,
Nadur, Gozo.
NDR 104.

Date: __________________________

Dear: __________________________

I am Shawn Meilak a physiotherapist currently reading for a Master’s degree in Health Services Management organised by the University of Malta. I am carrying out a research study entitled ‘A needs assessment for training physiotherapists in fieldwork supervision’.

In the course of the study I would like to seek your opinion regarding the current practices related to fieldwork supervision of students as adopted by physiotherapists and how and if these need to be improved. Your opinion is important in evaluating the ideas that physiotherapy managers might have.

It will be greatly appreciated if you could spare the time to participate in an interview related to the area of study. All the information obtained will be treated in strict confidence and none of the participants will be individually identified in the resultant study.

You are free to choose not to participate in the study or to change your mind about participating in the study on the day of the interview, which will be set up at your convenience. You are also entirely free to terminate your participation at any time or to decline to answer certain questions.

I intend to use a tape recorder during the interviews, and will need your consent (form attached) to record the interview should you decide to participate in the study. The recording will be used for the sole purpose of the study and your name and identity will not be revealed. The tape will not be made available to any other person.

132
The data collected will be coded so that it cannot be linked to your name. Your identity will not be revealed during the course of study or after. All the raw data collected will be stored in a secure place and will not be shared with any person other than, with your permission, the supervisor of my study. Data collected will be destroyed after successful completion of the study.

Whilst hoping that you will be able to participate in this study, I look forward to discussing this matter with you soon. I can be contacted at work on 25456600 or at home on 27859930 or on mobile number 99859930. I would like to thank you in anticipation for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Shawn Meilak
CONSENT FORM
(Physiotherapy Managers)

A needs assessment for training physiotherapists in fieldwork supervision.

Code Number: ________________

I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet.

I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving reason during the course of the study without any effect on my professional responsibilities.

I have no objection to the use of the tape recorder, as I know that my identity will not be revealed and that the raw data will be kept in a secure place and destroyed on successful completion of the study.

I agree to participate in the above study.

____________________  ____________________  ____________________
Name (Respondent)    Date                Signature

____________________  ____________________  ____________________
Researcher            Date                Signature

Form to be filled in DUPLICATE: 1 copy for Respondent and 1 copy for Researcher
I am Shawn Meilak a physiotherapist currently reading for a Master’s degree in Health Services Management organised by the University of Malta. I am carrying out a research study entitled ‘A needs assessment for training physiotherapists in fieldwork supervision’.

In the course of the study I would like to seek your opinion regarding the current practices related to fieldwork supervision as adopted by physiotherapists and how and if these need to be improved. Your opinion is important in evaluating the ideas that members of the education institution might have.

It will be greatly appreciated if you could spare the time to participate in an interview related to the area of study. All the information obtained will be treated in strict confidence and none of the participants will be individually identified in the resultant study.

Should you wish to participate in the study, you are being requested to fill in and return the consent form enclosed in the self addressed envelope provided. You are free to choose not to participate in the study or to change your mind about participating in the study on the day of the interview, which will be set up at your convenience. You are also entirely free to terminate your participation at any time or to decline to answer certain questions.

I intend to use a tape recorder during the interview, and will need your consent (form attached) to record the interview should you decide to participate in the study. The recording will be used for the sole purpose of the study and your name and identity will not be revealed. The tape will not be made available to any other person.
The data collected will be coded so that it cannot be linked to your name. Your identity will not be revealed during the course of study or after. All the raw data collected will be stored in a secure place and will not be shared with any person other than, with your permission, the supervisor of my study. Data collected will be destroyed after successful completion of the study.

Whilst hoping that you will be able to participate in this study, I look forward to discussing this matter with you soon. I can be contacted at work on 25456600 or at home on 27859930 or on mobile number 99859930. I would like to thank you in anticipation for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Shawn Meilak
CONSENT FORM  
(Education Institution)

A needs assessment for training physiotherapists in fieldwork supervision.

Code Number: ________________

I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet.

I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving reason during the course of the study without any effect on my professional responsibilities.

I have no objection to the use of the tape recorder, as I know that my identity will not be revealed and that the raw data will be kept in a secure place and destroyed on successful completion of the study.

I agree to participate in the above study.

_________________________  ________________________  ____________________
Name (Respondent)        Date                        Signature

_________________________  ________________________  ____________________
Researcher                Date                        Signature

Form to be filled in DUPLICATE: 1 copy for Respondent and 1 copy for Researcher
I am Shawn Meilak a physiotherapist currently reading for a Master’s degree in Health Services Management organised by the University of Malta. I am carrying out a research study entitled ‘A needs assessment for training physiotherapists in fieldwork supervision’.

In the course of the study I would like to seek your opinion regarding the current practices related to fieldwork supervision as adopted by physiotherapists and how and if these need to be improved. Your opinion is important in evaluating the ideas that physiotherapy students might have.

It will be greatly appreciated if you could spare the time to participate in a focus group related to the area of study. All the information obtained will be treated in strict confidence and none of the participants will be individually identified in the resultant study.

Should you wish to participate in the study, you are being requested to fill in and return the consent form enclosed in the self addressed envelope provided. You are free to choose not to participate in the study or to change your mind about participating in the study on the day of the focus group, which will be set up at your convenience. You are also entirely free to terminate your participation at any time or to decline to answer certain questions. Your supervision and relationship with the physiotherapists will not be affected.

I intend to use a tape recorder during the focus group, and will need your consent (form attached) to record the focus group should you decide to participate in the study. The recording will be used for the sole purpose...
of the study and your name and identity will not be revealed. The tape will not be made available to any other person.

The data collected will be coded so that it cannot be linked to your name. Your identity will not be revealed during the course of study or after. All the raw data collected will be stored in a secure place and will not be shared with any person other than, with your permission, the supervisor of my study. Data collected will be destroyed after successful completion of the study.

Whilst hoping that you will be able to participate in this study, I look forward to discussing this matter with you soon. I can be contacted at work on 25456600 or at home on 27859930 or on mobile number 99859930. I would like to thank you in anticipation for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Shawn Meilak
CONSENT FORM
(Physiotherapy students)

A needs assessment for training physiotherapists in fieldwork supervision.

Code Number: ______________

I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet.

I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving reason during the course of the study without any affect to my supervision on clinical placements and relationship with physiotherapists.

I have no objection to the use of the tape recorder, as I know that my identity will not be revealed and that the raw data will be kept in a secure place and destroyed on successful completion of the study.

I agree to participate in the above study.

_________________________  ______________________  ______________________
Name (Respondent) Date Signature

_________________________  ______________________  ______________________
Researcher Date Signature

Form to be filled in DUPLICATE: 1 copy for Respondent and 1 copy for Researcher
APPENDIX 4

ETHICS BOARD APPROVAL FORM
To be completed by Faculty Research Ethics Committee

We have examined the above proposal and advise

Acceptance ☑ Refusal Conditional acceptance

For the following reason/s:

Signature: [Signature]
Date: 07/14/01

To be completed by University Research Ethics Committee

We have examined the above proposal and grant

Acceptance ☐ Refusal Conditional acceptance

For the following reason/s:

Signature: [Signature]
Date: 16/07/01
APPENDIX 5

LETTERS OF APPROVAL
To: Dr S. Buttigieg  
PhD (Aston)  
Director, Institute of Health Care,  
Co-ordinator  
Health Services Management Studies  
University of Malta

Dear Dr Buttigieg,

I am currently reading for a Master’s degree in Health Services Management and am in the process of proposing a research study entitled “A needs assessment for training physiotherapists in fieldwork supervision”.

The study will involve one-to-one interviews with three purposively selected managers of physiotherapy services, ten clinically active physiotherapists working in the acute setting of Mater Dei Hospital, two members of the education institution as well as a focus group with 4th year physiotherapy students.

The main aim of this study is to determine whether Maltese physiotherapists acknowledge the need for training in student supervision. I will also try to identify the current practice in dealing with students’ clinical education and determine if the present practice is being effective in teaching students. The study aims to identify the attitudes of physiotherapy students, physiotherapy managers, physiotherapists acting as supervisors and key people of the educational institution towards fieldwork supervision.

The supervisor for this study will be Dr Paul Bezzina from the Institute of Health Care and your consent and that of the Board of Division is required prior to the Ethics Board approval.

Thanking you in advance for your kind co-operation.

Yours sincerely,

Shawn Meilak  
Msc. Health Services Management Student

Shawn Meilak  
‘Rockcliffe’  
Guze Ellul Mercer Str,  
Nadur, Gozo  
26th February 2008

Dr Sandra Buttigieg  
MD MSc MBA PhD (Aston)  
Institute of Health Care  
University of Malta
20th February, 2008

Mr Shawn Meilak
‘Rockcliffe’
Guze Ellul Mercer Str
Nadur, Gozo

Dear Mr Meilak,

I refer to your letter dated 12th February, 2008 requesting permission to carry out a research study.

Please note that the Office of the Registrar finds no objection to questionnaires being distributed to physiotherapy students, subject to approval of the Ethics Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Anthony Gellie
Registrar
Dear Ms. Rizzo,

I am currently reading for a Master’s degree in Health Services Management and am in the process of proposing a research study entitled “A needs assessment for training physiotherapists in fieldwork supervision”.

The study will involve one-to-one interviews with three purposively selected managers of physiotherapy services, ten clinically active physiotherapists working in the acute setting of Mater Dei Hospital, two members of the education institution as well as a focus group with 4th year physiotherapy students.

The main aim of this study is to determine whether Maltese physiotherapists acknowledge the need for training in student supervision. I will also try to identify the current practice in dealing with students’ clinical education and determine if the present practice is being effective in teaching students. The study aims to identify the attitudes of physiotherapy students, physiotherapy managers, physiotherapists acting as supervisors and key people of the educational institution towards fieldwork supervision.

The supervisor for this study will be Dr Paul Bezzina from the Institute of Health Care and your consent is required prior to the Ethics Board approval. I am therefore formally asking you as C.E.O. of Mater Dei Hospital for your consent to carry out the proposed study.

Thanking you in advance for your kind co-operation.

Yours sincerely,

Shawn Meilak
Senior Physiotherapist
To: Ms M. Muscat  
Manager Physiotherapy Services,  
Mater Dei Hospital

Dear Ms. Muscat,

I am currently reading for a Master’s degree in Health Services Management and am in the process of proposing a research study entitled “A needs assessment for training physiotherapists in fieldwork supervision”.

The study will involve one-to-one interviews with three purposively selected managers of physiotherapy services, ten clinically active physiotherapists working in the acute setting of Mater Dei Hospital, two members of the education institution as well as a focus group with 4th year physiotherapy students.

The main aim of this study is to determine whether Maltese physiotherapist acknowledge the need for training in student supervision. I will also try to identify the current practice in dealing with students’ clinical education and determine if the present practice is being effective in teaching students. The study aims to identify the attitudes of physiotherapy students, physiotherapy managers, physiotherapists acting as supervisors and key people of the educational institution towards fieldwork supervision.

The supervisor for this study will be Dr Paul Bezzina from the Institute of Health Care and your consent is required prior to the Ethics Board approval. I am therefore formally asking you as Manager of Physiotherapy Services in Malta for your consent to carry out the proposed study.

Thanking you in advance for your kind co-operation.

Yours sincerely,

Shawn Meilak  
Senior Physiotherapist
APPENDIX 6

SUPERVISOR ACCEPTANCE TO SUPERVISE THE STUDY
Re: Mr Shawn Meilak, M Sc Dissertation

I accept to act as supervisor to Mr Shawn Meilak for his dissertation leading to the award of an M Sc in Health Service Management by the Institute of Health Care, University of Malta.

The proposed title of the study is:

'A needs assessment for training physiotherapists in fieldwork education'

Dr Paul Bezzina
Co-ordinator
Radiography Division
Institute of Health Care