

Methods used by physical therapists to learn pelvic floor muscle examination

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DPT 850 – Integration Project

11/28/07

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Abstract:

Introduction: Treatment of pelvic floor muscle (PFM) dysfunction is a growing specialty in physical therapy. No information has been published about methods physical therapists (PTs) use to learn PFM examination or which examination methods PTs use. **Purpose:** To document current methods used by PTs in the United States (US) to learn PFM examination and the types of PFM examinations currently being used.

Methods: A sample of US PTs that treat PFM dysfunction was invited to complete an internet survey covering four areas: general information; current types of PFM examinations; professional education in PFM dysfunction; and post-professional experiences (self study, formal mentoring, and on the job training). **Results:** 203 surveys were completed. Most PTs (96.1%) learned PFM examination in post-professional continuing education courses and most PTs (73.9%) use vaginal palpation to examine the PFM. A small percentage (1.9%) do not know how to examine the PFM vaginally and 5.4% do not use any PFM examination. **Discussion:** Beginner pelvic PTs are more likely not use any PFM examination techniques however other factors appear to be limiting examination usage. PTs who do not know how to examine the PFM vaginally use EMG and have high confidence in their skills. Clinical education did not appear to increase confidence or skill. **Conclusions:** This study documents the current methods of learning and examination of PFM dysfunction. Unfortunately, some PTs provide PFM treatment without an adequate PFM examination. Understanding these situations may facilitate planning of educational opportunities for PTs in the field of pelvic physical therapy.