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TABLE OF CONTENTS

04

EDITOR'S NOTE



05

**CAREER EVENING AT
PEARSON HIGH SCHOOL**

12

WORKING WORLD EXHIBITION

07

**PHYSIOTHERAPISTS
LEADING EARLY
MOBILISATION IN ICU**

13

**PHYSIOWEEK IN RETIREMENT
COMMUNITIES**

09

**PHYSIOTHERAPY WEEK AT
MONTE ROSA**

14

LANGERUG SCHOOL GOLF DAY

10

**UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE
STATE STUDENT RESEARCH
WINNERS**

15

**HEALTHCARE FINANCING
CRISIS**



17

PELVIC HEALTH AWARENESS

EDITOR'S NOTE

October is always a special month in the physiotherapy calendar. With National Physiotherapy Week fresh in our minds, we celebrate the many ways physiotherapists across the country have championed this year's theme of Healthy Ageing. From community talks to exercise classes in retirement villages, from awareness campaigns to media outreach, our members once again showed the profession's dedication to keeping people strong, mobile and independent at every stage of life.

In this edition, you'll find inspiring stories from physiotherapists who took PhysioWeek into their communities, innovative ways colleagues are engaging with schools and students about career opportunities, and a spotlight on research and practice that reminds us why our work matters so deeply.

As we move into the last months of the year, I encourage you to reflect on the impact you've made in your practice and community. Physiotherapy is not only about treatment, but also about prevention, empowerment and improving quality of life. Together, we are building a healthier, more active South Africa. Enjoy this issue, and may it remind you of the difference we can make when we share our knowledge, skills and passion for movement.

Diana Coetzer



EASTERN CAPE & PUBLIC SECTOR CAREER EVENING – PEARSON HIGH SCHOOL, 14 MAY

Written by Marion Dawson

The Eastern Cape Public Sector volunteers and community service physiotherapists brought a fresh twist to the traditional career evening at Pearson High School this year. Instead of the usual presentation format of slides, questions and answers, and lucky draws, the team added a dynamic role-play and interactive demonstrations to give students and parents a real insight into the world of physiotherapy.

The presenters included community service physiotherapists Tessa Wartnaby (Dora Nginza Hospital), Emmarentia Wagner (first year post-community service at Gerald Muller Practice) and Melita Lee Katakuzinos. Together, they created a lively, informative and memorable evening for learners and their parents.

A Day in the Life of a Physiotherapist

Tessa Wartnaby kicked off the evening with a presentation on her daily routine as a community service physiotherapist. She described starting the day with a morning meeting to distribute the workload, working in three-month rotations, and her current placement in the outpatient department. Here she treats up to eight patients a day who come in for rehabilitation, while other physiotherapists rotate through the hospital wards to care for inpatients. Her talk gave learners a clear picture of the structure, variety and teamwork involved in physiotherapy practice.



Practical Demonstration – LTRI Role Play

Next, Tessa joined Emmarentia Wagner for a practical demonstration of a Lower Respiratory Tract Infection (LTRI) role play. They walked the audience through key physiotherapy techniques including:

- Auscultation with a stethoscope
- Chest percussion
- Active Cycle of Breathing Techniques (ACBT)
- Use of a spirometer
- Walking and light exercise

This hands-on approach allowed learners to see physiotherapy in action and highlighted the clinical skills involved in cardiorespiratory care.

Busting Common Misconceptions

Emmarentia then addressed some of the most common misconceptions about physiotherapy, such as:


- Physiotherapists only treat sports injuries
- Physiotherapy is just massage and exercise
- You only need physiotherapy after surgery or injury
- Physiotherapists, chiropractors and biokineticists are the same
- Exercises can simply be found online
- A doctor's referral is always required to see a physiotherapist

Her session helped learners better understand the breadth of physiotherapy practice and its importance in healthcare.



The Road to Becoming a Physiotherapist

To conclude, Melita Lee Katakuzinos guided learners through the academic pathway to becoming a physiotherapist. She explained subject requirements at matric level (Mathematics, Physical Sciences and Life Sciences), the Admission Point Score needed (35–40), and the importance of job shadowing for certain universities. She also outlined where physiotherapy is offered in South Africa, including the universities of Cape Town, Stellenbosch, the Free State, Pretoria, KwaZulu-Natal, the Western Cape, the Witwatersrand and Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University. Learners were given an overview of the four-year degree, which covers subjects such as Physics, Chemistry, Anatomy, Physiology, Pharmacology and physiotherapy-specific courses. The degree is highly practical, with clinical placements beginning in the second or third year. After graduation, all physiotherapists are required to complete one year of community service before they can practise independently in South Africa.

This innovative career evening gave students and parents not just information, but also a true sense of the profession's diversity, skill and impact. The Eastern Cape Public Sector volunteers and community service physiotherapists succeeded in making physiotherapy come alive for the next generation. 



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CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE: PHYSIOTHERAPISTS LEADING EARLY MOBILISATION IN ICU

Written by: Ilse du Plessis



Early mobilisation in the ICU has gained significant traction in recent years, proven to be both feasible and safe, while challenging the long-held tradition of prolonged bed rest in critical care. As part of international best-practice frameworks, like the ABCDEF bundle, now include early mobilisation as a core standard linked to positive effects on various short and long-term patient outcomes. For physiotherapists, this shift represents both an opportunity and a challenge: how do we take these benefits from the research arena into the reality of busy ICUs?



Despite the benefits, implementation in daily ICU practice remains variable. Barriers are typically grouped into four main categories: patient-related factors (such as clinical instability and delirium, presence of lines and attachments), clinician-related factors (including limited knowledge, confidence or safety concerns), protocol-related factors (unclear or inconsistent criteria) and ICU context-related factors (such as challenges with interdisciplinary team coordination) (Popoola et al 2022; Bennion et al 2024; Costa et al 2017).

Clinical Impact: Why Early Mobilisation Matters

Evidence shows that early mobilisation may help to protect muscle function, reduce delirium, shorten time on mechanical ventilation, promote psychological well-being and long term functional status. These are all outcomes that matter to patients, families and the healthcare team alike (Zang et al 2019, Whang et al 2020).


Building on What Works – and the Role of Physiotherapists

Success depends on far more than good intentions alone. Structured safety protocols help standardise and sustain practice, while implementation thrives when physiotherapists are consistently embedded in the ICU– building continuity, trust and expertise over time. Staff who witness positive patient outcomes become stronger advocates for early mobilisation, further reinforcing its value.

Physiotherapists are uniquely positioned to turn these enablers into everyday reality. Beyond delivering interventions, they can lead the development of protocols, educate colleagues and work closely with doctors and nurses to dismantle barriers. By fostering open communication and supporting local “mobility champions” across disciplines, physios can help embed mobilisation into routine ICU culture. (Bennion et al., 2024; Tadyanemhandu et al., 2024; Lago et al 2022).

Leading the Culture Shift

This raises important reflections for physiotherapists aiming to embed early mobilisation into ICU culture. What does it truly mean to be a “mobility champion” in your setting? For some, it may involve leading protocol development, coordinating care across disciplines, and motivating patients; for others, it may focus on improving knowledge, driving awareness, or even combining all these elements. Equally important is the question of how physiotherapists can engage the broader ICU team in meaningful ways. Strategies such as mobility-focused briefings, shared protocols or interprofessional training sessions may help shift team norms and attitudes. Finally, each ICU must consider what practical steps are most realistic within its context, whether that means dedicating physiotherapy resources, developing simple but effective mobilisation protocols, or appointing “mobility champions” across professions to make early mobilisation the default rather than the exception.

As physiotherapists, we are already experts in mobility; perhaps the next challenge is becoming experts in leading teams to embrace and sustain mobilisation practices as part of everyday ICU care. 



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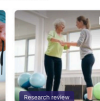
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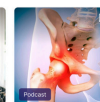
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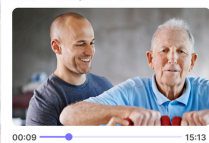


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NO.1 PHYSIOTHERAPY COMMUNITY

PHYSIOTHERAPY WEEK AT MONTE ROSA

Led by Third-Year UCT Physiotherapy Students

Monte Rosa was alive with energy and laughter as residents joined third-year physiotherapy students from the University of Cape Town to celebrate Physiotherapy Week. Running from Monday to Thursday, the programme encouraged movement, learning and fun, while highlighting the importance of staying active to prevent falls and maintain independence.

Monday: Learning and Laughter

The week began with an interactive talk on falls prevention. Residents learned about common causes of falls and practical ways to stay safe and steady. A lively quiz turned the classroom into a game show, with small prizes adding to the excitement.

Later, participants joined a balance-focused exercise session, practising movements to improve stability. The day ended with ball games that sparked plenty of laughter, as residents showed off their reflexes and coordination. More prizes kept spirits high throughout.

Tuesday: A Breath of Fresh Air

Residents enjoyed a refreshing outing to the Company's Garden. The guided walk gave everyone a chance to stretch their legs, breathe in fresh air and appreciate the beauty of nature together. It was a reminder that exercise can feel effortless when shared in good company and a beautiful setting.

Wednesday: Strength in Numbers

Midweek activities focused on leg-strengthening exercises, essential for staying mobile and reducing fall risk. Afterwards, ball games encouraged teamwork, friendly competition and plenty of cheering from the sidelines.

Thursday: Finishing with Fun

The final day celebrated balance and play. Residents practised confidence-boosting movements before enjoying balloon games that had everyone laughing and moving together. The balloons added a fun element of surprise while improving coordination and reaction time.

A Week to Remember

Physiotherapy Week at Monte Rosa was about more than exercise, it was about community, connection and celebrating what our bodies can do. The UCT students brought knowledge, energy and warmth, while residents shared enthusiasm, humour and a wonderful spirit of participation.

Together they created a week filled with learning, movement and joy, proving that staying active can be both meaningful and fun. 



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UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE SHARES WINNING STUDENT RESEARCH

ARTICLE 1

ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS, GENERAL HEALTH INFORMATION AND PHYSICAL WELL BEING OF PATIENTS LIVING WITH CANCER IN THE FREE STATE

Students: E. Joubert, T. Mametja, M. Mohlamonyane & C. Sevenster

Study leader(s): Mrs C Stander, Prof R Barnes

Background: Cancer is the second leading cause of mortality, with treatment and clinical presentation impacting, the Health Related Quality of Life (HRQoL) of individuals globally.

Objectives: The study aimed to determine associations between socio-demographic factors, general health information and physical well-being (PWB) of patients living with cancer in the Free State.

Method: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted at the Universitas Annex oncology ward and clinic. A standardised FACT-G questionnaire as well as a socio-demographic and general health questionnaire were used for data collection in adults living with cancer.

Results: Participants totalling to 864 were conveniently sampled at the oncology ward and clinic at Universitas Annex. The participants' median age was 57.5 with 64.1% being female. Participants scored a median of 18 (interquartile range: 12-23.3) on the PWB sub-scale of the FACT-G. The study found statistically significant associations between PWB and cervical ($p=0.00$), prostate ($p=0.04$) and lung cancer ($p=0.05$), chemotherapy ($p=0.00$) and no treatment ($p<0.00$). Statistically significant associations were also found between PWB and employment status, full time ($p=0.00$), part time ($p=0.00$) and unemployed ($p<0.00$).

Conclusion: The study indicated that PWB in participants are associated with employment status, cancer type and treatment received. The role of physiotherapy in oncology rehabilitation can assist with improving the PWB through patient centred interventions.

Clinical implications: Higher PWB can be associated with lower mortality risk. It is important to promote physical activity as part of physiotherapy interventions in cancer care as it can influence both HRQoL and survival outcomes.

Keywords: HRQoL, Physical well-being, Cancer, FACT-G.



UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE SHARES WINNING STUDENT RESEARCH

ARTICLE 2

UNCOVERING THE LINKS: HOW DOES SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC AND GENERAL HEALTH INFORMATION INFLUENCE THE FUNCTIONAL WELL-BEING OF INDIVIDUALS DEALING WITH CANCER?

Students: Jotam Phakathi, Fabio Santos, Maryke van Bosch, Ruandi van Dyk, Nikhe Vlok

Study leader(s): Mrs Karen Bodenstein

Background: Cancer and cancer-related treatment are associated with symptoms and complications that influence all domains of health-related quality of life (HRQoL) of individuals dealing with cancer, including functional well-being (FWB).

Objective: To determine associations between socio-demographic and general health information and FWB of individuals dealing with cancer.

Methods: This descriptive, cross-sectional study utilised a standardised questionnaire, the FACT-G as well as a self-developed questionnaire for data collection from February to May 2025. Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants 18 years or older, literate in Afrikaans, English and Sesotho who were admitted to the oncology wards or attending the oncology clinic at University Annex, Bloemfontein.

Results: A total of 864 participants were included in the data analysis with most participants being female (64.1%) and a median age of 57.5 years. There was a statistically significant association between FWB and age groups ($p=0.02$), as well as employment status respectively. Employment status included working full-time ($p<0.01$), part-time ($p<0.01$) and unemployed ($p<0.01$). Regarding comorbidities and cancer types, a statistically significant association was found between FWB and tuberculosis ($p=0.02$), and FWB and breast cancer ($p=0.03$).

Conclusion: The results emphasise the importance of considering sociodemographic and general health information to promote a more holistic approach to the management of individuals dealing with cancer. These insights support more patient-centered care and can assist physiotherapists to address FWB by means of education, exercise and pain management to improve HRQoL. Further research is however, needed to determine the direction of the associations.

KEYWORDS: Cancer, FACT-G, functional well-being, HRQoL, physiotherapy



WORKING WORLD EXHIBITION 18–20 FEBRUARY 2025

Written by: Marion Dawson

This year marked the fourth time that the Eastern Cape SASP exhibited at the Working World Exhibition. The EC SASP is proud to promote the profession of physiotherapy at this prestigious event. Each year, the exhibition is organised in collaboration with both the private and public sector.

The 26th edition of the Working World Exhibition took place in person at the Feather Market Centre in Nelson Mandela Bay from 18–20 February 2025. The event is held annually during the first school term, carefully positioned to avoid exam periods and to assist learners with early educational application deadlines. As one of the biggest career expos in South Africa, the exhibition empowers the country's youth, including many underprivileged learners who have limited or no access to career guidance resources. To accommodate parents wishing to attend with their children, expo hours were extended until 6 pm on the opening day. This change saw a noticeable increase in parental attendance.



The event also caters to learners from former Model C schools, ensuring that the visitor base reflects South Africa's diverse demographics.

This year's exhibition attracted 9 893 visitors, including:

- 8 100 Grade 11 and 12 learners from 65 schools attending in organised groups
- 153 Grade 11 and 12 learners attending independently
- 122 teachers
- 1 538 unemployed individuals and members of the general public

Best Stand Awards

Organisations were recognised for their creativity, visitor engagement and enthusiasm. The awards went to:

- 1st Place: Woodlands Dairy
- 2nd Place: SAIAB & Varsity College
- 3rd Place: SA Physio

(Eastern Cape SASP has consistently ranked in the top three for stand awards: 1st place in 2022, 3rd place in 2023, 2nd place in 2024 and 3rd place in 2025.)

Career guidance counselling was offered through large briefing sessions as learners entered the expo, as well as at the Career Guidance Café. In addition, the Career Guidance Workbook, distributed to 20 000 Grade 12 learners and used extensively as part of the Life Orientation syllabus, featured the names of exhibitors who booked ahead of the print deadline.

CELEBRATING HEALTHY AGEING: PHYSIO WEEK IN RETIREMENT COMMUNITIES

Written by: Rita Conradie

As part of National Physiotherapy Week, physiotherapists Rita Conradie and Carien Loubser visited several retirement communities to promote healthy ageing, falls prevention and the importance of staying active at every stage of life. The visits combined exercise classes, educational talks and encouragement for both residents and staff to make movement a regular part of daily living.

Millennium Park Retirement Village


On Monday, the team joined the residents of Millennium Park for their weekly group exercise class. This class follows the Otago Exercise Programme, which was introduced there a year and a half ago. It was inspiring to see that the residents have continued with the programme independently, and even more rewarding to hear their stories of how the exercises have improved their strength, balance and quality of life.

Bellinganhof Retirement Home

On Wednesday, the focus shifted to Bellinganhof Retirement Home, where the innovative Kwiekroute has been established. Residents also enjoyed an outdoor group exercise class, combining movement with the joy of being in fresh air and sunshine. The exercises not only targeted strength and balance but also encouraged social connection and fun.

Healthy Ageing at the Heart of Physio Week

At each visit, Rita and Carien shared talks on National Physiotherapy Week's theme of healthy ageing. They highlighted the importance of staying fit, preventing falls and maintaining a good quality of life regardless of age. Residents were reminded that physiotherapy is not just about treating injuries, but about enabling people to move well, stay strong and live independently for longer.

These community visits showed the lasting impact physiotherapy can have, whether through sustained exercise programmes like at Millennium Park, or through renewed inspiration to get moving again, as at Tuis Huis. Most importantly, they reinforced the message that healthy ageing is possible and valuable at every stage of life. 



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THE HEALTHCARE FINANCING CRISIS AND THE IMPACT ON GAP COVER: A FIVE-YEAR ANALYSIS OF SOUTH AFRICA'S HEALTHCARE FUNDING CHALLENGE

MEGA GAP CLAIMS SURGE REVEALS PRIVATE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM UNDER COST PRESSURE

OPINION BY MARTIN RIMMER, CEO OF SIRAGO UNDERWRITING MANAGERS

A comprehensive five-year analysis of gap cover claims reveals a healthcare funding crisis that's rapidly escalating across the South African private healthcare sector. Data from Sirago Underwriting Managers shows that its mega gap claims – those exceeding R50,000 – have exploded by 512% in volume and 437% in value between 2020 and 2024.

The numbers tell a stark story: where 89 mega gap claims totalling R6.2 million were paid in 2020, this figure rocketed to 549 claims worth R34 million in 2024. Perhaps most concerning is that claims exceeding R60,000 are now daily occurrences, with the average large loss gap claim sitting at R63,000 – a far cry from the R6,000 to R12,000 averages seen pre-2020.

The Perfect Storm: Medical Scheme Erosion Meets Provider Cost Inflation

This upward trajectory reflects a fundamental shift in South Africa's healthcare landscape. Medical schemes – constrained by affordability, access, aging membership populations, and where private healthcare already consumes up to 20% of household income – are systematically reducing benefits and transferring more risk onto the member, rather than increasing premiums to match out-of-control healthcare provider cost inflation.

Healthcare provider costs have consistently outpaced inflation by more than double for years, yet unlike pharmaceuticals, there's no pricing regulation on healthcare provider tariffs. In a country facing a dire shortage of healthcare professionals, specialists are free to charge rates often 500%+ higher than medical scheme reimbursements.

The regulatory framework compounds this issue. The Registrar of Medical Schemes mandates that for Prescribed Minimum Benefit (PMB) conditions, where no Designated Service Provider agreement exists, healthcare providers must be paid in full regardless of the charge – essentially providing a blank check.

Breaking Down Sirago's Large Loss (Mega) Gap Claims Data (2020–2024)

Five-Year Trend Analysis

- **2021:** 118% increase in claims value paid compared to 2020, driven by COVID-19 impacts and deferred elective surgeries.
- **2022–2024:** Average annual increase of 35% year-on-year in large loss claims volumes.
- Highest claims: R200,000+ for ischaemic heart disease conditions in the 50+ age group.

Age Demographics Challenge Assumptions

Contrary to expectations, healthcare crises aren't limited to older populations:

- **50–65 years:** 31% of claims (average: R65,065)
- **66–75 years:** 27% of claims (average: R64,213)
- **76+ years:** 18% of claims (average: R62,773)
- **30–49 years:** 18% of claims (average: R58,116)
- **0–29 years:** 5% of claims (average: R63,360)



The under-49 age group constitutes 23% of all large loss claims, dispelling notions that major health expenses only affect older demographics, and which highlights the risk transfer challenges faced and imposed by medical schemes.

Claims Distribution

- **62%:** R40,000–R60,000
- **30%:** R61,000–R100,000
- **6%:** R101,000–R150,000
- **2%:** R151,000–R210,000

Leading Conditions Driving Claims

- **Musculoskeletal Dominance**

Over 51% of claims across all age groups involve musculoskeletal conditions, with spinal stenosis leading the charge. Medical schemes often impose strict limits on elective musculoskeletal surgeries due to high costs, particularly for internal prosthetics where co-payments can reach 30% of the hospital account if members don't subscribe to the scheme-imposed protocols.

- **Cancer and Circulatory Conditions**

Each representing 10% of large loss claims, these conditions reflect both the effect from the delayed diagnosis impact of COVID-19 and the high-cost nature of specialised treatments. Malignant neoplasms of the breast, prostate, and colon lead cancer claims, while acute ischaemic heart disease dominates circulatory conditions.

- **The Exploitation Factor**

Gap insurance is increasingly becoming a target for exploitation. Healthcare providers now routinely ask patients upfront about gap coverage before determining charges, creating a troubling paradox where a R700 monthly gap policy might pay R130,000 for an orthopaedic surgery shortfall, while the medical scheme with an R8,000 monthly premium pays just R30,000. This exploitation threatens the sustainability of gap insurance itself. If current trends continue, gap insurance premiums will inevitably rise, making this crucial protection unaffordable for many South Africans.

The Critical Importance of Gap Cover


Despite these challenges, gap cover remains essential, irrespective of medical scheme option. Most medical schemes have deductibles, co-payments, and reimbursement limits that can leave members significantly out of pocket. The gap between scheme payments and specialist charges can be substantial – often 200% to 500% above scheme tariffs and this isn't limited to basic hospital cover options. Even comprehensive, top-tier medical scheme benefits leave members facing substantial tariff shortfalls for in-hospital procedures.

The Economics of healthcare financial protection

When you consider the potential financial quantum of a shortfall on your medical scheme benefits, and that a gap cover premium is around R700 per month for a family (2025 Sirago Ultimate Gap), and each family member is covered for up to a maximum of R213 000 per annum, it is clear that Gap Cover is a non-negotiable part of your healthcare financing strategy. A single gap claim of R63k, Sirago's average large loss claim, would be the equivalent of almost 9 years of premium payments at current premium rates.

Sirago's mega claims data reveals a private healthcare funding system under severe strain. As medical schemes transfer more financial risk to members through tariff shortfalls, co-payments, and exclusions, gap insurance becomes not just "a-nice-to-have" insurance policy, but essential for financial protection.

However, the sustainability of this model depends on addressing the root causes: unregulated provider pricing, systematic benefit erosion, and the exploitation of gap insurance by unscrupulous providers. Without intervention, South Africa's healthcare funding crisis will continue to deepen, leaving patients to bear an ever-increasing financial burden.

For consumers, the message is clear: always negotiate pricing for planned surgeries and request formal quotes from all medical role players. In a system where healthcare providers are price makers and medical schemes and gap providers are price-takers, informed patient advocacy becomes crucial for financial survival and your continued access to quality private healthcare. 

(Claims statistics drawn from Sirago's Large Loss Claims Analysis, 2020-2025)

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SPREADING AWARENESS ON PELVIC HEALTH: REFLECTIONS ON A WOMEN'S DAY PRESENTATION

WRITTEN BY LINDA CHANDLER

As part of the Letaba Hospital Women's Day celebrations, I was invited to present a talk on pelvic health and physiotherapy. I was excited, as Women's Day was the ideal platform to highlight this often-overlooked aspect of women's health and to open conversation in a supportive and empowering space.

Pelvic floor dysfunction affects many women across all stages of life. It can present as bladder urgency, incontinence, pelvic pain, or challenges after pregnancy and childbirth. Yet, despite its prevalence, it is still surrounded by silence and stigma. My presentation aimed to raise awareness of the signs and symptoms, to normalise conversations around pelvic health, to emphasise that help is available, and to encourage women to take a proactive stance. I wanted to address the topic as a whole—not only physiotherapy or pelvic health—but also to emphasise that by being informed, each one of us can help, whether as women or as healthcare professionals across disciplines.

I gave a brief overview of the anatomy of the pelvic floor, risk factors for dysfunction, common issues, and management strategies for the most prevalent pelvic floor conditions. I also highlighted the role of physiotherapy in both prevention and management. As physiotherapists, we are uniquely positioned to educate, guide, and empower women through tailored pelvic floor exercises, lifestyle advice, and other various treatment strategies.

Presenting at this event was both rewarding and humbling. The audience—all women, including healthcare workers and hospital staff—were eager to learn more about their health. Their engagement—through questions, nods of recognition, and shared experiences—reminded me how important it is that we continue breaking the silence around pelvic health. What stood out most were the discussions that followed, women who admitted they had been, or knew someone who had been, struggling in silence, unaware that help was available.

As a presenter, I felt encouraged by the openness of the discussion and the positive reception of the topic. Speaking in this space reinforced for me the impact that physiotherapists can have beyond the clinic room—through education, advocacy, and empowerment.

I believe that creating more opportunities for physiotherapists to share knowledge at community events can strengthen our profession's role in advancing women's health. Awareness is the first step toward change, and I am grateful to have been part of a platform that celebrated women while also equipping them with tools to live with less pain and more confidence.

