

Physical Therapy in Colombia

The histories about Physical Therapy in Colombia, now more than ever, must be to be reassessed.

Although the first studies on these reports revealed the existence of at least three distinct periods, we shall remember: scattered practices, institutionalization process, professional consolidation and professional relocation and disciplinary development; nowadays we must show that such linear and Western viewpoints are not the single ones, and that they make other histories, other practices, other viewpoints of the profession become invisible. We will allude to an overview considering that this viewpoint is biased and partial in relation to a profession within a multicultural, diverse and historically inequitable country.

Institutional training began in 1952 as a technical, female oriented career, for ladies of urban elites. It lasted two years and sought to manpower for the polio epidemic in Colombia., in addition to the contingencies of a country that had just began its efforts to industrialize; these elements assign a professional impression that we still have not been able which makes it very hard to study issues such as gender, professional identity, medical subordination and tariff difficulties. The training of the time was instrumental and focused on the techniques and strategies of approach.

In 1953, when the profession is heard in the country, the *Asociación Colombiana de Fisioterapia*¹ (ASCOFI – Colombian Association of Physical Therapy) began to function as a trade union entity to promote and publicize the new profession in Colombia. In 1954, according to the Decree 1056, the exercise of the profession was regulated.

Considering that membership is not mandatory and that the maintenance of ASCOFI requires annual maintenance fees, its survival became a question.

From the mid-1960s, Physical Therapy became an undergraduate course and its training time increased to three years, not as the result of an analysis of the development achieved in the first few years, but by isolated pressures from universities which failed to adapt the technological training

to their mission. At that moment there were five programs, three public and two private, located in the capitals of municipalities, of which, only two were in the country's capital. In 1976, Law 9 determined it was a University course and still maintains it.

Law 30 of 1992 is a clear example of this task. At that time, the Ministry, under the neoliberal gaze of the Free Market, legitimizes the opening of many Physical Therapy courses, for 35 programs in total, and only five of them public. Courses in general last five years, with a possible link from the last training periods with graduate subjects that easily generate the deepening of knowledge that shall lead to the next level of training; given the existence of multiple accredited master's degrees and some that touch on interdisciplinary subjects. The curriculum adopted the academic Credit system as a measure of training time.

The programs were united on August 21, 1998, under the name of *Asociación Colombiana de Facultades de Fisioterapia* (ASCOFAFI – Colombian Association of Physical Therapy Schools), with the purpose of attracting the interests of training programs. That process has managed to unify the titles offered, so all could be considered as Physical Therapists.

In 1999, Law 528 considers Physical Therapy as a “liberal profession, in the area of healthcare, with university training...”². This pioneering law in the framework legislation of the professions in Colombia, has as object of study the human body movement. In Colombia, the study of Chiropractic and Osteopathic practices are considered further studies in the area of Physical Therapy.

In 2010, the government issued a new regulation for the exercise of the public service of healthcare professions, Decree 4192, which provides the management of such professions. The Decree included the regulation of the single Register of healthcare professionals, and the issuance of the professional card, with national scope – being the only instance that the current government – or following ones – will recognize as a place of dialogue on the development of these,

the professional Schools. Thus, on July 27, 2015, the *Colegio Colombiano de Fisioterapia* (COLFI – Colombian School of Physical Therapy) took on public functions.

It is now 2019 and my colleagues of profession have been killed and some of them need protective measures so their families and lives are protected. They and their families have been pressured by a model dominated by doctors and a patriarchal system that wants to go back in time. The union between ASCOFI-ASCOFAFI-COLFI with the participation of the *Asociación Colombiana de Estudiantes de Fisioterapia* (Acefite – Colombian Association of Physical Therapy Students), has brought forward whole proposal of resistance for the first time, with a plan for unified professional development.

All of this takes place at the same time that Colombia faces the huge challenges of signing a peace agreement. This agreement is based on several post-conflict forces and as result there will be a social reconfiguration that highlights the importance of

Physical Therapy considering these new social, political, territorial, and historical conditions.

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