

JOINT STATEMENT OF THE
AMERICAN CONGRESS OF REHABILITATION MEDICINE
AND THE
AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PHYSICAL MEDICINE AND REHABILITATION

WHAT IS PHYSICAL MEDICINE AND REHABILITATION ?

Physical Medicine is the diagnosis and treatment of diseases by physical means, in its broadest sense "Applied Medical Biophysics."

Rehabilitation, in this reference, applies to the methods used to restore a disabled patient to his community as the most useful and self-sustaining individual compatible with his residual capabilities.

The physiatrist, who is the specialist in this field, is trained in the broad diagnostic technique known to all physicians. In addition, he is versed in the special diagnostic and therapeutic techniques embodied in his specialty.

What are the physical means used ? They include heat, water, electricity, sound , mechanical force, massage, and exercise. Each is used for its special physiologic and therapeutic properties consistent with the medical judgment necessary in each case.

The physiatrist is also concerned in the total rehabilitation process of restoring disabled individuals to their community. His special skills in implementing this, among others, are the aspect of physical rehabilitation in which he utilizes the tools of applied biophysics, ie, Physical Medicine. In addition, he is directly involved in readaptation of the disabled by testing functional capacity. Improving residual motor and sensory ability, training in activities of daily living (ADL), prescription of adaptive devices varying from artificial limbs to orthotic splints for enhancing functions. He recognizes that there are equally important aspects of rehabilitation in the psycho-social and vocational fields. While he is not directly concerned in the methodological implementation, he is involved as coordinator of all these services in pursuit of a common goal for the disabled person. This total involvement stems both from training in the specialty as well as from the fact that interest in readaptation to environment brings him to the understanding of the patient's total needs.

The number of patients who need Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation and the multiplicity of disorders require many additional hands to carry out the physician's orders. The professional people most used in rehabilitation are physical and occupational therapists, rehabilitation nurses, and speech therapists. Other commonly required professions contributing patient care are: (1) medical social worker, (2) psychologist, (3) vocational guidance personnel. Each professional person brings a skill to be afforded the patient who is in need of his service, just as each physician-specialist contributes his skill to the patient's total care.

The patients in need of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation come from nearly all specialties in the field of medicine. The quality of their care will depend on the physiatrists' understanding of the implications of the possible residual disability on future adjustment to life.