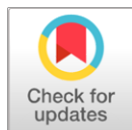




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Writing Effective Policy Briefs to Bridge Research and Policy

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As we celebrate the 3rd anniversary of the Philippine Journal of Physical Therapy (PhJPT), we reflect on our journey and the significant impact we have had in advancing the physical therapy profession. Our current editorial policies, which guide the types of manuscripts we accept, align with our mission to “improve patient care through the elevation of physical therapist education and practice.” We have grown with our readership, deepening our understanding of issues related to our practice not only through the papers we publish but also through the discussions in our online presentations and supplementary activities.

In our ongoing pursuit of quality improvement, we continuously ask ourselves: “What else?” What are we missing? How can we offer content that remains valuable to our readers? How can we continue to evolve with the people we serve?

In 2018, the total research and development (R&D) net of business for the Philippines was around Php 26.25 billion with Php 2.312 billion spent on the protection and improvement of human health, representing the specific socio-economic research objective with the fourth highest spending in the country (Diaz-Manalo, Dumangas, Villaluz, & Lopez-Tuazon, 2022). Despite these costs, the healthcare system struggles to ensure that effective and efficient programs and services reach all those in need.

A persistent challenge in clinical and health research is the failure to translate research into practice and policy (Grimshaw, Eccles, Lavis, Hill, & Squires, 2012). This evidence-practice gap results in patients not fully benefiting from healthcare advancements, leading to reduced quality of life and productivity at both personal and societal levels (Grimshaw et al., 2012). Also, decision-making, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), remains complex, making evidence-informed decisions challenging to achieve (Murunga, Oronje, Bates, Tagoe, & Pulford, 2020). Therefore, the need for research-based knowledge to guide health policy formulation and implementation is a global concern that hampers quality healthcare delivery (Edwards, Zweigenthal, & Olivier, 2019).

Despite these difficulties, some successes indicate a positive shift in this trend (Murunga et al., 2020). Hence, local, regional, and international efforts have intensified to bridge the disparity between what is known from evidence and what is implemented in practice and policy – the “know-do” gap (World Health Organization, 2006). This led to the emergence of a specialized field focused on promoting the uptake of research into policy and practice, often referred to as knowledge translation (Edwards et al., 2019).

Thus, the PhJPT aims to capitalize on this novel opportunity, especially as advocacy for our profession is a key focus. In this spirit, we have decided to discuss including policy briefs in our journal. These briefs are crucial for translating research into actionable policies that will shape the future of healthcare and improve patient care.

Effective communication between academics and policymakers remains a challenge, largely due to differences in language, priorities, and timelines. Policymakers, often working under tight schedules, need clear and actionable information to guide their decisions. This is where well-crafted policy briefs play a crucial role (Bach et al., 2023).

A policy brief is a short document that combines text and visuals to summarize the key points of one or more research studies. It provides a succinct explanation of a policy issue or problem and presents options along with specific recommendations to inform policymakers' decisions or motivate action for addressing the issue or problem (Keepnews, 2016 as discussed in Arnautu & Dagenais, 2021).

For policy briefs to achieve their intended impact, they must be clear, concise, evidence-based, and, most importantly, practical and actionable. Integrating behavioral insights into these briefs enhances their effectiveness, making them more likely to resonate with stakeholders throughout the policy process. A well-constructed policy brief is a powerful tool that distills research findings into actionable recommendations (Arnautu & Dagenais, 2021).

When policy briefs adhere to these principles, they are more likely to influence policy decisions and create meaningful change. They serve to raise awareness of current research on key policy issues and communicate evidence-based recommendations in a format that is both concise and accessible. Given that policymaking is a cyclical process, there are many opportunities to influence policy at various stages—from its formation to its implementation and evaluation (Rajabi, 2012).

Policy briefs can be presented in different formats, and their effectiveness can vary greatly depending on how they are designed. For instance, a study examined the impact of two types of policy briefs—one focused on data and the other on narrative—in communicating the link between sugar-sweetened beverage consumption and tooth decay. These briefs were sent to 825 policymakers across various levels of government in Washington State, USA. The study assessed their effectiveness based on criteria such as clarity, credibility, likelihood of being used, and likelihood of being shared. The findings revealed that although both types of briefs were generally perceived as clear and credible, they were not widely used or shared, except among state-level officials who were more likely to distribute the information. This suggests that while policy briefs are useful for conveying research, additional efforts are needed to increase their influence on policy decisions (Lee et al., 2024).

The approach of policy briefs can be viewed on a spectrum, ranging from "neutral," which provides objective and nuanced information, to "interventionist," which offers specific solutions to identified problems (Dagenais and Ridde, 2018). However, it is important to note that a policy brief is neither an advocacy statement nor an opinion piece (Arnautu & Dagenais, 2021). Instead, it is analytical, objective, and fact-based, even when the evidence is compelling (Wong et al., 2017 as discussed in Arnautu & Dagenais, 2021).

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada's foreign affairs and development has developed a comprehensive, step-by-step guide on writing a policy brief. This guide, available on their website, covers everything from planning your policy brief to offering a detailed template. It can be an invaluable resource for writers who are new to crafting policy briefs (International Development Research Centre, 2024).

As we celebrate this milestone of the PhJPT, we invite our readers—researchers, academicians, and practitioners—to share their feedback with the Editorial Board regarding the inclusion of policy briefs in our journal. Should this initiative be officially approved, we are particularly interested in submissions that offer insights into tailoring policy briefs for specific audiences, strategies for measuring their impact, and lessons learned from practical applications.

For instance, a policy brief might propose reforms in health education curricula to better align with global standards and local needs, such as incorporating interprofessional education, enhancing clinical training, and integrating topics like public health, digital health, and health policy.

Another example could be a policy brief focused on strategies for effectively implementing Universal Health Care (UHC) coverage, with an emphasis on improving access to healthcare services in remote and underserved areas whilst fortifying primary health care services in the country. Such a brief might offer recommendations on strengthening local health units, ensuring sustainable financing, and addressing infrastructure gaps.

Given the country's vulnerability to natural disasters, integrating physical therapy into disaster preparedness and response plans is vital. Policy briefs could propose strategies to ensure that rehabilitation services are available during emergencies, highlighting the role of physical therapy in enhancing disaster resilience and recovery.

Finally, policy briefs can influence health legislation by advocating for laws that protect the rights of patients and healthcare workers, improve working conditions for physical therapists, and promote public health. By addressing these key issues through well-crafted policy briefs, stakeholders can contribute to the ongoing development of a more equitable, effective, and resilient healthcare system.

Your contributions will play a vital role in enhancing the dialogue between research and policy, helping to ensure that evidence-based recommendations reach the policymakers who can implement change. As we celebrate this important milestone, let us continue to advance the mission of evidence-based practice in physical therapy through thoughtful and effective communication to advance advocacy.

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