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PLATFORM PRESENTATION

SPECIALIZATION IN PEDIATRIC PHYSICAL THERAPY AT AN ACADEMIC LEVEL IN THE GERMAN–SPEAKING REGION OF SWITZERLAND
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PURPOSE: Comprehensive specialist postgraduate education is essential to obtain the level of qualifications necessary to work as a physical therapist in the field of pediatric physical therapy. These qualifications cannot be acquired within the framework of an entry-level bachelor program. The Institute of Physiotherapy at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences has developed a Master of Advanced Studies in Pediatric Physical Therapy program, which is composed of 3 Certificates of Advanced Studies plus a master thesis. The MAS in Pediatric Physical Therapy is the first comprehensive specialist postgraduate educational program for physical therapy professionals in the field of pediatrics at an academic level to be offered in the German-speaking region of Switzerland.

RELEVANCE: The aim of the postgraduate program is to train physical therapists as experts in all relevant fields (e.g. orthopedics, rheumatology, pneumology, neurology, development). The students will qualify as clinical experts, allowing them to fulfill all the roles that lead to optimal health and healthcare outcomes.

DESCRIPTION: The MAS in Pediatric Physical Therapy conforms to the Bologna Process. The qualification awards 60 credits, which allows, due to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), transparency, comparability and recognition throughout Europe. The program is oriented towards both academic objectives and professional competences. The students are intensively active in the course, accept a high level of individual responsibility and use various learning methods and platforms, including networking and collaborative learning. The academic teaching methods include lectures (40%), guided self-study such as several exercises, casework presentation, coaching for competencies (15%) and autonomous self-study (45%). Tandem work is found to be very efficient and satisfying because both younger BSc students, as well as students with long clinical experience, can profit from each other. Each module ends with an oral and/or practical and/or theoretical proof of competencies. In August 2011, the postgraduate program Certificate of Advanced Studies in “Clinical Expertise in Pediatric Physical Therapy” started at the Institute of Physiotherapy of the Zurich University of Applied Sciences.

The program of the CAS in “Clinical Expertise in Pediatric Physical Therapy” comprises three modules: 1) Normal and aberrant development of children. Topics that belong to this module are normal development, pathology, motor control and developmental psychology; 2) Educational theory, social environment, assessment. Topics that belong to this module are law, insurance, ethics, educational theory, didactics, communication, clinical diagnostics and assessment; 3) Intervention (intervention in the field of orthopedics, rheumatology, pneumology, neurology, development) for children 3 years and older. The program of the CAS in Health Sciences and Professional Leadership includes topics, such as epidemiology, research methodology, biostatistics and publication, in preparation for the Master thesis. Additional topics included are public health, quality management, communication, didactic and coaching for extended expertise. The program of the CAS specialist expertise in Pediatric Physical Therapy includes topics such as complex pathology, rehabilitation, early...
intervention (baby treatment), hydrotherapy and assistive products and technology.

EVALUATION: Each module of the CAS in “Clinical Expertise in Pediatric Physical Therapy” was evaluated twice: 1) Written module evaluation on an e-learning platform (obligatory). The results of this evaluation are very good participant satisfaction, strong motivation for self-reflection, excellent goal attainment and acquisition of consolidated findings, particularly in the field of orthopedics, developmental psychology, strength training for children and adolescents, ICF-CY, EBM and assessment application; 2) Informal verbal evaluation following each module. The 18 participants of the first “Clinical Expertise in Pediatric Physical Therapy” program described this advanced education as demanding, evident and very educational. Self-study, Evidence Based Practice and tandem work are all considered very efficient and satisfying learning methods. The results of the various tests and examinations acted as an additional evaluation. The results were in the range between “good” and “very good”.

CONCLUSIONS: The most important innovations compared to conventional programs are: 1) A comprehensive specialist education is attained within the framework of a clearly defined curriculum at a University of Applied Sciences, where the requisite competencies for certification are well defined and transparent; 2) Evidence based practice has great importance; 3) Student-oriented teaching means greater self-study (60%); 4) Competence oriented examinations, in theory as well as practice; 5) Greater emphasis on professional leadership (extended skills).

IMPLICATIONS: The comprehensive program enables students to work as generalists in the field of pediatrics in hospitals, as well as in private practice and schools for handicapped children. The extensive professional leadership skills learned (e.g. law, insurance, ethics, educational theory, didactics, communication) means that physical therapists are equipped to cope with the patients’ clinical and various other questions.