



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF PHYSICAL THERAPY RESEARCH & PRACTICE

AN OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF SAUDI PHYSICAL THERAPY ASSOCIATION



Original Article

Accreditation and Its Impact on Physiotherapy Outcomes in Saudi Arabia Advancing Quality and Patient Care: A Narrative Review

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Article info

Received : **Dec.16, 2024**
Accepted : **Feb. 26, 2025**
Published : **Mar. 28, 2025**

To Cite: Al Shami, A. Accreditation and Its Impact on Physiotherapy Outcomes in Saudi Arabia Advancing Quality and Patient Care: A Narrative Review. International Journal of Physical Therapy Research & Practice, 4(3), 193–199. <https://doi.org/10.62464/ijopr.v4i3.76>

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Abstract

This literature review examines the role of healthcare accreditation frameworks—specifically CARF (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities), CBAHI (Saudi Central Board for Accreditation of Healthcare Institutions), Planetree, and JCI (Joint Commission International)—in enhancing physiotherapy services in Saudi Arabia. A systematic search was performed using PubMed and Google Scholar databases, focusing on peer-reviewed studies published in English between January 2000 and December 2024 that assessed accreditation's influence on physiotherapy care quality. The review identified significant improvements attributable to accreditation, notably enhanced patient safety through reduced clinical errors, strengthened adherence to standardized clinical guidelines, and effective risk management. Accreditation also facilitated staff professional development, leading to increased competency, better clinical decision-making, and improved service delivery. Furthermore, standardizing physiotherapy practices through accreditation frameworks positively influenced patient outcomes, including better functional recovery, increased patient satisfaction, and higher overall service quality. The findings underscore accreditation as a critical strategy for advancing physiotherapy care standards in Saudi Arabia, emphasizing the need for continued implementation and support. The review advocates for widespread adoption and sustained integration of accreditation frameworks to achieve ongoing improvement in rehabilitation service quality and patient experiences within the Saudi healthcare system.

Keywords: Physiotherapy, Accreditation, Quality, Saudi Arabia, Outcome.

Introduction

Accreditation in healthcare ensures that services are delivered according to internationally recognized standards of care, patient safety, and quality. Historically, healthcare systems, including physiotherapy services, operated with varying levels of standardization, often leading to inconsistent practices and suboptimal patient outcomes. Before the introduction of accreditation,

rehabilitation services lacked formalized standards, which made it challenging to ensure consistent care across different healthcare facilities. The need for improving the quality of healthcare services, ensuring patient safety, and enhancing treatment outcomes led to the establishment of accreditation systems.

In the late 20th century, organizations such as the Joint Commission International (JCI) and the

Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) pioneered formal accreditation processes in healthcare. These frameworks introduced standardized guidelines for clinical care, patient safety, and organizational management, shaping the evolution of rehabilitation practices globally. In Saudi Arabia, the adoption of accreditation standards in physiotherapy services has led to notable improvements in care quality and patient outcomes. Organizations like CARF, the Saudi Central Board for Accreditation of Healthcare Institutions (CBAHI), Planetree, and JCI have played pivotal roles in shaping physiotherapy practices to align with global best practices. CARF enhances rehabilitation practices (Black & Roberts, 2001), while CBAHI aligns healthcare facilities with national standards to improve safety and quality (Saudi Central Board for Accreditation of Health Institutions, 2008).

This paper explores how these accreditation frameworks contribute to advancing physiotherapy practices in Saudi Arabia with a focus on patient outcomes, staff development, and service standardization.

Methodology

A comprehensive literature search was conducted using PubMed and Google Scholar databases. Search terms included combinations of “physiotherapy,” “accreditation,” “quality improvement,” “JCI,” “CARF,” “CBAHI,” “Planetree,” “patient outcomes,” and “patient satisfaction.” Boolean operators (e.g., “AND,” “OR”) were used to refine the search. Studies published between January 2000 and December 2024 were included. Inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed articles in English that focused on the impact of accreditation on physiotherapy services. Exclusion criteria included non-peer-reviewed

articles, studies lacking relevance to physiotherapy, and those focused solely on other healthcare domains.

As this is a narrative review, the selection process was guided by relevance to the topic rather than strict systematic protocols allowing for a broader understanding of the impact of accreditation on physiotherapy practices.

Results

Role of Accreditation Bodies in Physiotherapy

CARF (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities)

CARF accreditation ensures that rehabilitation services meet high standards of care (CARF, 2024). Hospitals and physiotherapy clinics in Saudi Arabia accredited by CARF have shown improved patient outcomes and service delivery, as evidenced by increased satisfaction and rehabilitation success (Ullah et al., 2018).

CBAHI (Saudi Central Board for Accreditation of Healthcare Institutions)

CBAHI plays a significant role in enhancing healthcare services by accrediting hospitals and physiotherapy centers. Studies have shown that CBAHI accreditation results in better performance in physiotherapy departments, particularly positive impact on the satisfaction of Physiotherapy Department (Shaikh, 2017). According to the CBAHI-accredited facilities report, improved management practices and an increased focus on patient-centered care (CBAHI, 2008).

Planetree

Planetree focuses on patient-centered care and enhances the quality of life for patients undergoing rehabilitation. In physiotherapy settings, Planetree

helps implement models of care that prioritize communication, patient satisfaction, and holistic treatment approaches. Stone (2008) demonstrated that hospitals adopting the Planetree model of care saw improvements in patient engagement and rehabilitation outcomes. In Saudi Arabia, the implementation of Person-Centered Care Certification standards led to notable improvements, including an increase in bedside shift report compliance from 64.2% to 88.6%, a rise in Care Partner program compliance from 62.6% to 87.4%, and enhanced employee experiences (Zuber et al., 2018).

JCI (Joint Commission International)

JCI is recognized globally for its rigorous standards of healthcare quality and patient safety. JCI-accredited hospitals in Saudi Arabia have reported enhanced clinical practices, standardized treatment protocols (Al Shawan, 2021), and improved collaboration among staff (Al Shawan, 2021), all contributing to better physiotherapy outcomes.

The Benefits of Accreditation in Physiotherapy Practices

To better understand the impact of different accreditation frameworks on physiotherapy practices, a summary of the key findings from both Saudi Arabia and international studies is presented in Table 1. This table highlights the outcomes measured and the specific improvements observed in patient care, staff development, and organizational impact. While the majority of studies focus on Saudi Arabia, additional international findings are included to provide a broader perspective on the global relevance and effectiveness of accreditation frameworks in enhancing physiotherapy services.

Table 1: Summary of Key Findings by Accreditation

Framework

Accreditation Framework	Outcome Measured	Key Results	References
CARF	Patient Outcomes	15% improvement in functional independence	Becker et al., 2009
CBAHI	Safety and Compliance	30% reduction in adverse events	Al-Qahtani et al., 2018
Planetree	Patient Satisfaction and Engagement	80% of patients felt care was personalized	Frampton et al., 2008
JCI	Patient Mobility, Safety Standards	20% increase in patient mobility post-accreditation	Smith et al., 2015
CBAHI	Staff Development	95% of physiotherapists engaged in training	Al-Mutairi et al., 2019
Planetree	Employee Experience	Increase in bedside shift report compliance from 64.2% to 88.6%	Zuber et al., 2018

Patient Outcomes

Accreditation ensures that physiotherapy departments adhere to high standards of care, leading to improved patient outcomes. For instance, JCI accreditation mandates strict compliance with evidence-based practices and comprehensive patient care protocols. Studies like Smith et al. (2015) reported a 20% increase in patient mobility scores post-JCI accreditation, highlighting how structured guidelines and regular audits drive better clinical results.

Accreditation mandates compliance with safety standards, significantly reducing medical errors and adverse events. Compliance with safety protocols is rigorously monitored and enforced by accrediting bodies like JCI and CBAHI. Al-Qahtani et al. (2018) demonstrated a significant reduction in adverse events, illustrating the role of accreditation in promoting a safe care environment.

Standards such as those from JCI emphasize patient safety, reducing errors and building trust between patients and healthcare providers. Accreditation frameworks like Planetree focus heavily on patient-centered care. This approach includes involving patients in their care plans, respecting their preferences, and providing holistic treatment that addresses physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. Frampton et al. (2008) highlighted that 80% of patients in Planetree-accredited facilities felt their care was personalized, leading to higher satisfaction and better therapeutic outcomes.

Staff Development

Accreditation includes staff training, ensuring physiotherapists are equipped with the skills necessary to provide high-quality care. Al-Mutairi et al. (2019) reported that 95% of physiotherapists in CBAHI-accredited hospitals participated in ongoing education and training programs, which enhances their skills and knowledge, ultimately benefiting patient care.

Organizational impact

Accreditation bodies like JCI and CBAHI require facilities to engage in continuous quality improvement (CQI) activities. These activities include regular internal audits, feedback mechanisms, and performance evaluations. Al-Qahtani et al. (2018) found a 30% reduction in adverse events in CBAHI-accredited departments, demonstrating how CQI initiatives help identify and rectify areas of concern, leading to safer and more effective care.

Accreditation frameworks such as CARF emphasize the standardization of care processes. This standardization includes the implementation of uniform assessment tools, treatment protocols, and documentation practices. Becker et al. (2009)

noted that CARF-accredited facilities showed a 15% improvement in functional independence measures, largely due to consistent application of standardized rehabilitation protocols.

Accredited physiotherapy departments often attract more patients due to the enhanced reputation resulting from adherence to global standards. Accreditation builds trust among patients, healthcare providers, and stakeholders. Accredited facilities are perceived as more reliable and dedicated to quality care. This trust enhances the reputation of the institution and attracts more patients. Wright et al. (2015) noted that CARF-accredited facilities enjoyed higher patient trust and loyalty, contributing to their sustained success.

Discussion

The literature review highlights the significant role that adherence to accreditation standards plays in improving physiotherapy services, with frameworks such as JCI, CARF, CBAHI, and Planetree serving as essential benchmarks (Almutairi et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2015). These accreditation systems contribute not only to the technical quality of care but also shape the organizational culture within healthcare facilities. For instance, CARF's specialized focus on rehabilitation-specific standards offers targeted benefits tailored explicitly for physiotherapy services. In contrast, JCI provides broader benchmarks that emphasize patient safety, evidence-based practices, and operational efficiency across diverse healthcare settings. Moreover, CBAHI's localization within Saudi Arabia's healthcare goals has effectively aligned healthcare facilities with national priorities, which is particularly relevant given the context-specific cultural and logistical considerations outlined in recent studies (Alqahtani et al., 2018).

Despite these benefits, it is essential to critically

assess the applicability and effectiveness of frameworks such as JCI and Planetree across various global healthcare contexts (Smith et al., 2015). Several studies highlighting the effectiveness of these accreditation systems have been conducted outside Saudi Arabia, raising questions about their direct applicability due to differing healthcare infrastructures, resource availability, and socio-cultural contexts. This limitation underscores the importance of conducting region-specific research tailored to local healthcare environments and resources. The evidence from Saudi Arabia indicates significant improvements in patient adherence, satisfaction, functional outcomes, and cost-effectiveness, particularly when accreditation standards are adapted to local contexts (Babakkor et al., 2023).

Moreover, the successful implementation of CARF, CBAHI, and other accreditation frameworks relies heavily upon institutional support and a dedicated commitment to continuous quality improvement. Recent findings from Saudi Arabia affirm that effective integration of accreditation standards involves not only adopting standardized treatment protocols but also enhancing multidisciplinary collaboration and patient-centered care (Almutairi et al., 2019; Alqahtani et al., 2018; Alshawan et al., 2021). However, the integration of these frameworks also presents considerable challenges, including high implementation costs, resource limitations, and extensive training requirements. Smaller or rural healthcare facilities often encounter significant difficulties in meeting such standards without additional financial support or tailored interventions (Alshawan et al., 2021).

Furthermore, maintaining these rigorous accreditation standards—particularly in areas related to staff development and continuous education—can place considerable strain on

already resource-constrained institutions. Such challenges necessitate tailored solutions and flexible implementation approaches, emphasizing the importance of adaptability within accreditation models to better accommodate diverse healthcare settings, particularly those in resource-limited environments. Addressing these issues proactively through supportive policies, financial assistance, and region-specific research could significantly enhance the broader adoption and sustained impact of accreditation standards on physiotherapy outcomes in Saudi Arabia and similar healthcare contexts.

Limitations

Acknowledging the limitations of the studies reviewed, it is clear that many findings are based on secondary data, which may lead to a lack of depth in understanding the full scope of accreditation's impact. Furthermore, several studies were region-specific, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other healthcare systems. The publication bias, where studies reporting positive outcomes are more likely to be published, may also skew the overall understanding of accreditation's true impact. These limitations call for more comprehensive, region-specific studies and primary data collection to provide a more nuanced understanding of accreditation's effectiveness.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this review, several recommendations can be made to enhance the impact of accreditation frameworks in physiotherapy services:

For Healthcare Providers

Healthcare providers should establish regular review processes to assess how well accreditation standards are being integrated into daily practices and identify areas for improvement. It is crucial for

healthcare providers to fully embrace accreditation as a continuous process rather than a one-time event. Maintaining accreditation standards should be integrated into daily practice and organizational culture, ensuring that patient safety, care quality, and staff development remain at the forefront.

For Policymakers

Policymakers should consider offering financial incentives and support to smaller healthcare facilities to help them achieve and maintain accreditation. Such support could include providing training resources, funding for accreditation-related costs, and fostering collaborative networks to share best practices.

Conclusion

This paper highlights the significant role that accreditation frameworks, such as CARF, CBAHI, Planetree, and JCI, play in advancing physiotherapy practices in Saudi Arabia. By adhering to these accreditation standards, physiotherapy services in the country have experienced considerable improvements in patient outcomes, safety, staff development, and overall care quality. Accreditation provides a structured approach to continuous quality improvement, standardization of care, and patient-centered practices, which ultimately enhance patient satisfaction and trust. The evidence suggests that these frameworks have a positive impact not only on the operational efficiency of healthcare facilities but also on the long-term success and reputation of physiotherapy departments. Therefore, the adoption and integration of accreditation standards are essential for maintaining high-quality, patient-centered rehabilitation services and for meeting global best practices in physiotherapy.

Future Research

Future research should focus on longitudinal studies that track the long-term effects of accreditation on patient outcomes, healthcare provider satisfaction, and organizational performance. Comparative studies between different accreditation frameworks and across different regions would help identify the most effective models for diverse healthcare settings. Research into the barriers to accreditation in low- and middle-income countries could also provide valuable insights and guide the development of strategies to overcome these challenges.

Author Contributions

I, Abdullah AlShami, am the sole author of this manuscript. I take full responsibility for the content and accuracy of the work. This manuscript has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration for publication by any other journal. I confirm that I have made substantial contributions to the conception, design, writing, and revision of the manuscript. I declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this work.

Data Availability Statement

The authors will transparently provide the primary data underpinning the findings or conclusions of this article, without any unjustified reluctance. If need from editorial team.

Funding

The author/s have not received any funding for. This study.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest related to the research, writing, or publication of this work.

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