PHYSIOTHERAPY AND KINESIOLOGY BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Editorial

Gaetano Raiola
Research Center of Physical Education and Exercise,
Pegaso University, Italy
gaetano.raiola@unipegaso.it

Agron Kasa
Department of Sports Performance, Sports Research Institute,
Sports University of Tirana, Albania
akasa@ust.edu.al

Historical pathways and scientific foundations of movimenta professions

The relationship between physiotherapy and kinesiology raises a question that reaches beyond professional boundaries: how can distinct forms of expertise contribute to continuity between rehabilitation, prevention and participation in everyday life? The answer requires recognition of the scientific and educational foundations of both professions. When these foundations remain unclear, collaboration becomes vulnerable to competing claims over movement and exercise. This Special Issue offers an opportunity to place the discussion within a broader account of the development of movement sciences, where professional identity and shared responsibility must be considered together.

The contributions collected examine the evolution of movement professions, university and school education, motor learning and methodological innovation. Together, they connect scientific inquiry with educational practice and public policy. International comparisons of professional models and qualifications remain a priority for extending this work.

Within this landscape, physiotherapy and kinesiology have followed different institutional trajectories. In Italy, the professional identity of the physiotherapist developed through the organisation of rehabilitation within healthcare and the progressive recognition of university education, autonomy and professional responsibility. The definition of the professional profile and the subsequent reforms of healthcare professions constitute central stages in this process (Ministerial Decree No. 741/1994; Law No. 42/1999; Law No. 251/2000). This history explains the close relationship between physiotherapy, clinical assessment and rehabilitation. It should not, however, be reduced to a representation of treatment in which the person remains passive: active exercise, learning and engagement also belong to rehabilitation practice.

Kinesiology draws on the educational and scientific history of physical education, exercise and sport. The ISEF tradition and its transformation into university programmes established a pathway combining movement methodology with pedagogical, psychological and biomedical knowledge (Law No. 88/1958; Legislative Decree No. 178/1998). The professional recognition introduced by the sports reform must therefore be understood in relation to an educational history that precedes it (Legislative Decree No. 36/2021). A recently formalised professional designation does not imply that its underlying knowledge, research traditions or educational responsibilities are equally recent.

The preventive and adapted physical activity kinesiologist, identified in Italy as the AMPA kinesiologist, makes this relationship particularly visible. The LM-67 pathway develops expertise in planning, supervising and evaluating exercise programmes adapted to individual capacities and needs. Its contribution includes the methodological organisation of exercise, the interpretation of motor learning processes and the educational conditions that support participation over time. Biomedical preparation supports this work within interdisciplinary settings. The specific value of the pathway lies in the integration of these competencies, rather than in a simple comparison of the duration of university programmes. Credit totals alone cannot establish professional hierarchies or determine entitlement to particular activities.

Scientific recognition also matters. The organisation of Physical Training and Sports Sciences within the Italian academic system provides a disciplinary framework for research and education in exercise methodology and sport (Ministerial Decree No. 639/2024). This framework supports the argument that kinesiology has identifiable objects of inquiry and methodological responsibilities. Academic organisation and professional regulation nevertheless answer different questions. The existence

of a disciplinary field does not, by itself, settle the legal boundaries of practice; nor does a profession's location within healthcare exhaust the scientific contribution it can make. A productive debate requires these distinctions to remain explicit.

The comparison with Eastern European and Balkan traditions broadens the discussion. The example of the University of Sports of Tirana invites reflection on academic arrangements that bring movement sciences and rehabilitation into closer institutional proximity. Such arrangements suggest that the relationship between education, exercise and functional recovery can be organised in different ways. They should be examined through detailed comparisons of curricula, practical training and professional responsibilities, avoiding the assumption that a shared vocabulary establishes equivalence between qualifications. Theories of motor coordination and adaptive behaviour remain useful intellectual resources for this inquiry (Bernstein, 1967; Anokhin, 1974).

For public policy, the central issue is whether systems promoting structured physical exercise recognise the competencies needed to design and deliver it. The recognition of the AMPA kinesiologist within interdisciplinary exercise provision deserves particular attention. Decisions affecting exercise provision should involve the relevant scientific and professional communities and clarify responsibilities across the pathway. Collaboration becomes credible when assessment, referral, programme design and monitoring are connected through transparent procedures, with due regard for the applicable regulatory framework and the circumstances of each person.

This Special Issue calls for comparative research on professional education, collaboration and outcomes meaningful to individuals and communities. University programmes should connect methodological knowledge, practical competence and interdisciplinary communication. Policymakers should recognise preventive and adapted physical activity within opportunities for participation. The relationship between physiotherapy and kinesiology is ultimately tested in the continuity of those opportunities: to recover function, sustain activity and develop autonomy. Professional identity acquires its strongest justification when it enables that shared responsibility.

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