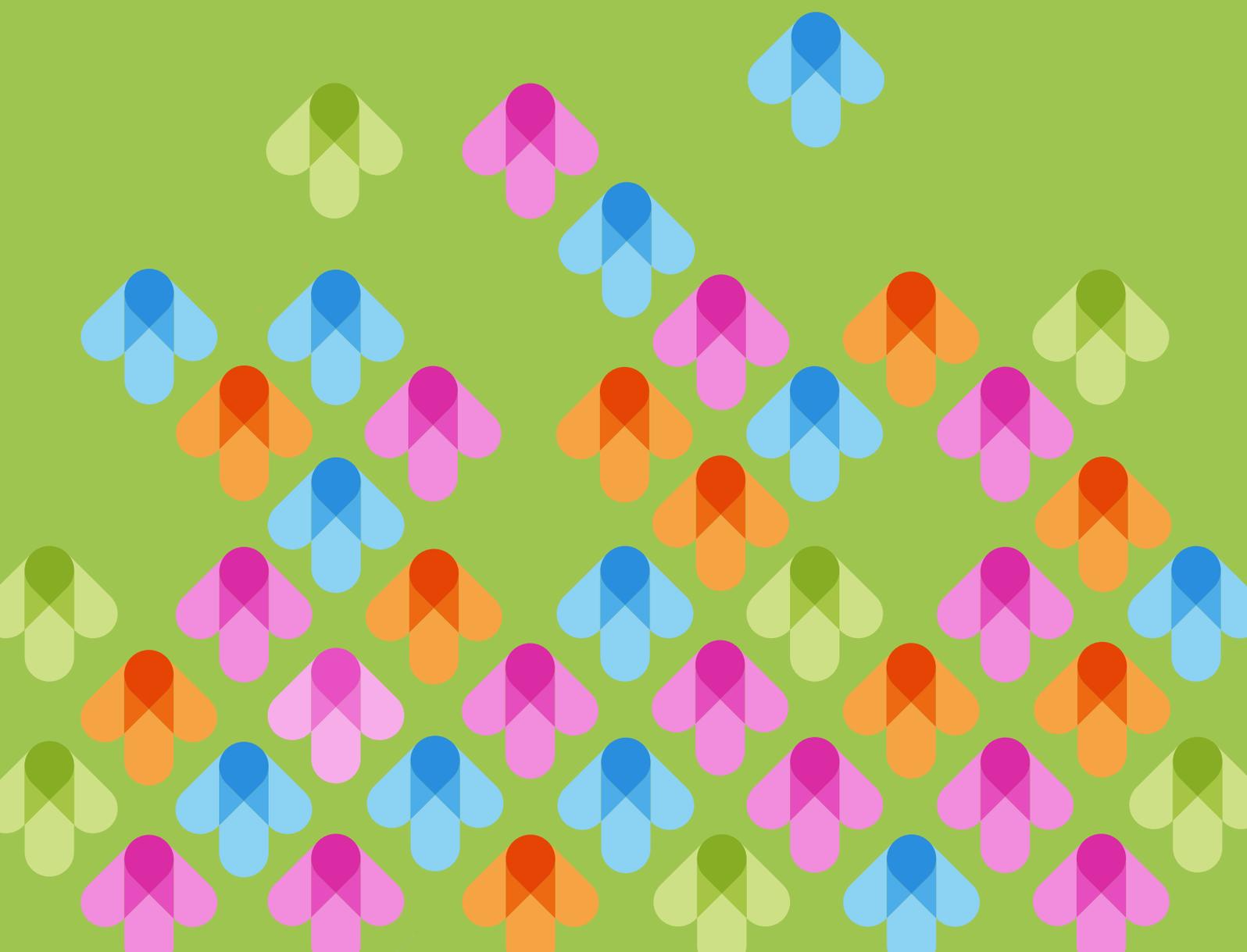


Standards of Practice for Physiotherapists

Working with adults with a learning disability

Executive Summary for Professionals

Sarah Bruce & David Standley



Introduction

Adults with a learning disability experience poorer health than the general population.

(Emerson et al. 2010).

They have a shorter life expectancy and are at greater risk of premature death.

(Hollins et al. 1998; Heslop et al. 2013).

Adults with a learning disability have the same rights to access mainstream health services as the general population but they regularly receive inadequate health care.

(Mencap 2007; Department of Health 2009; Heslop et al. 2013).

All public services, including the health sector, have a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments to facilitate positive access and outcomes.

(Equality Act 2010).

Most people with a learning disability will be able to access mainstream services with reasonable adjustments.

(ACPPLD 2016).

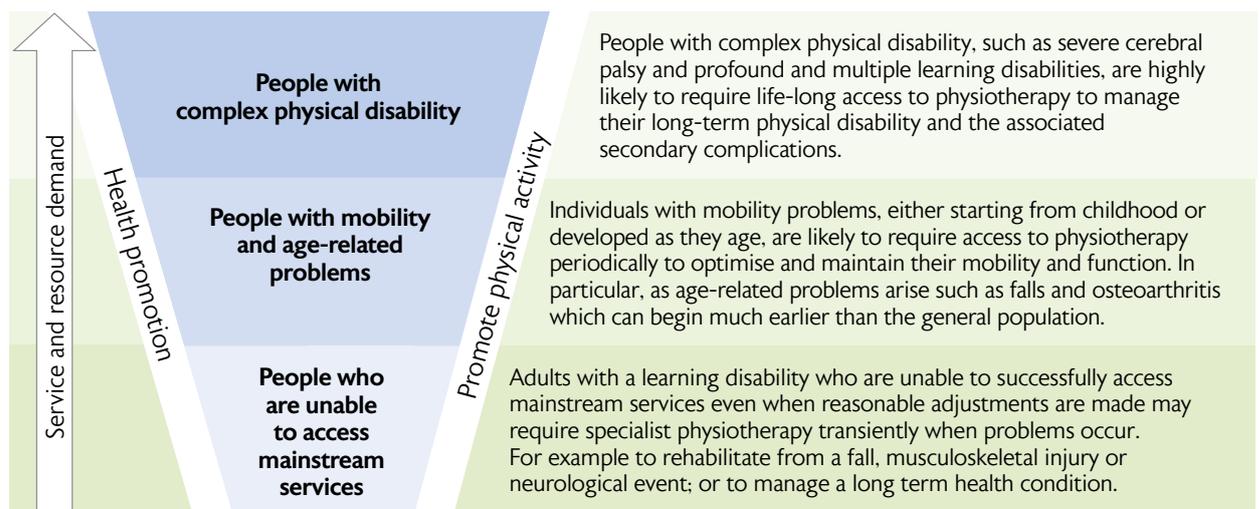
However, some people will require adjustments that go beyond what is reasonable and possible for mainstream services and will require access to specialist learning disability services.

Learning disability physiotherapists make the specialist adjustments required to provide physiotherapy to adults with a learning disability whose needs cannot be successfully met by mainstream services, even when reasonable adjustments are made. Either through supporting positive access to and responses from services; or by providing direct assessment and intervention.

Physiotherapy needs of adults with a learning disability

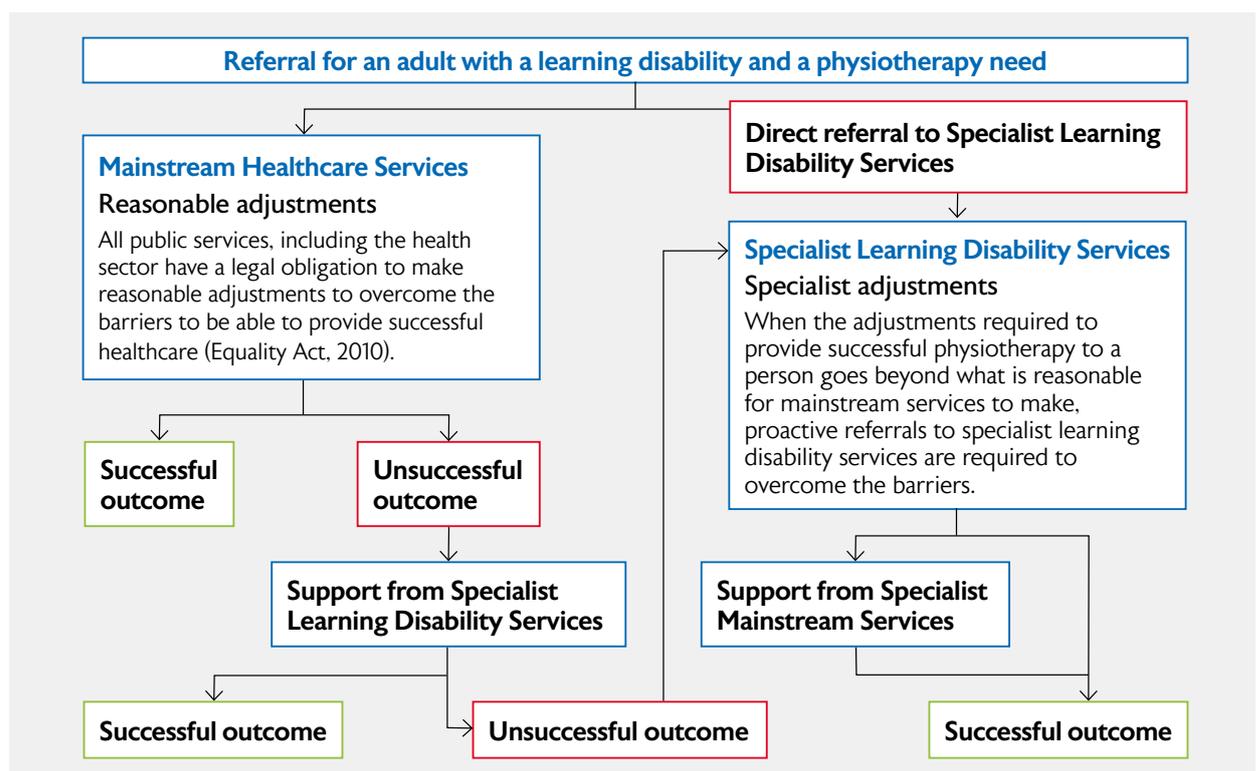
Physiotherapists are an integral part of specialist learning disability teams and are critical to meeting the physiotherapy needs of adults with a learning disability (Learning Disability Professional Senate 2015; National Quality Board 2018). There are a number of factors that predispose this population of people to developing physiotherapy related problems. These include associated physical impairments and conditions; premature aging; increased risk of injuries and falls; poor health literacy; and leading sedentary and unhealthy lifestyles. As a result, many adults with a learning disability will require access to physiotherapy at some point within their lifetime. Thus, specialist learning disability physiotherapists have an important role to play in supporting the health and wellbeing of people with a learning disability.

The main areas where specialist learning disability physiotherapists provide services:



Adults with a learning disability and a physiotherapy need can achieve a successful outcome via mainstream physiotherapy services with reasonable adjustments, or through learning disability physiotherapy services with specialist adjustments. Often mainstream and specialist teams will need to work in collaboration to share and combine their knowledge and skills.

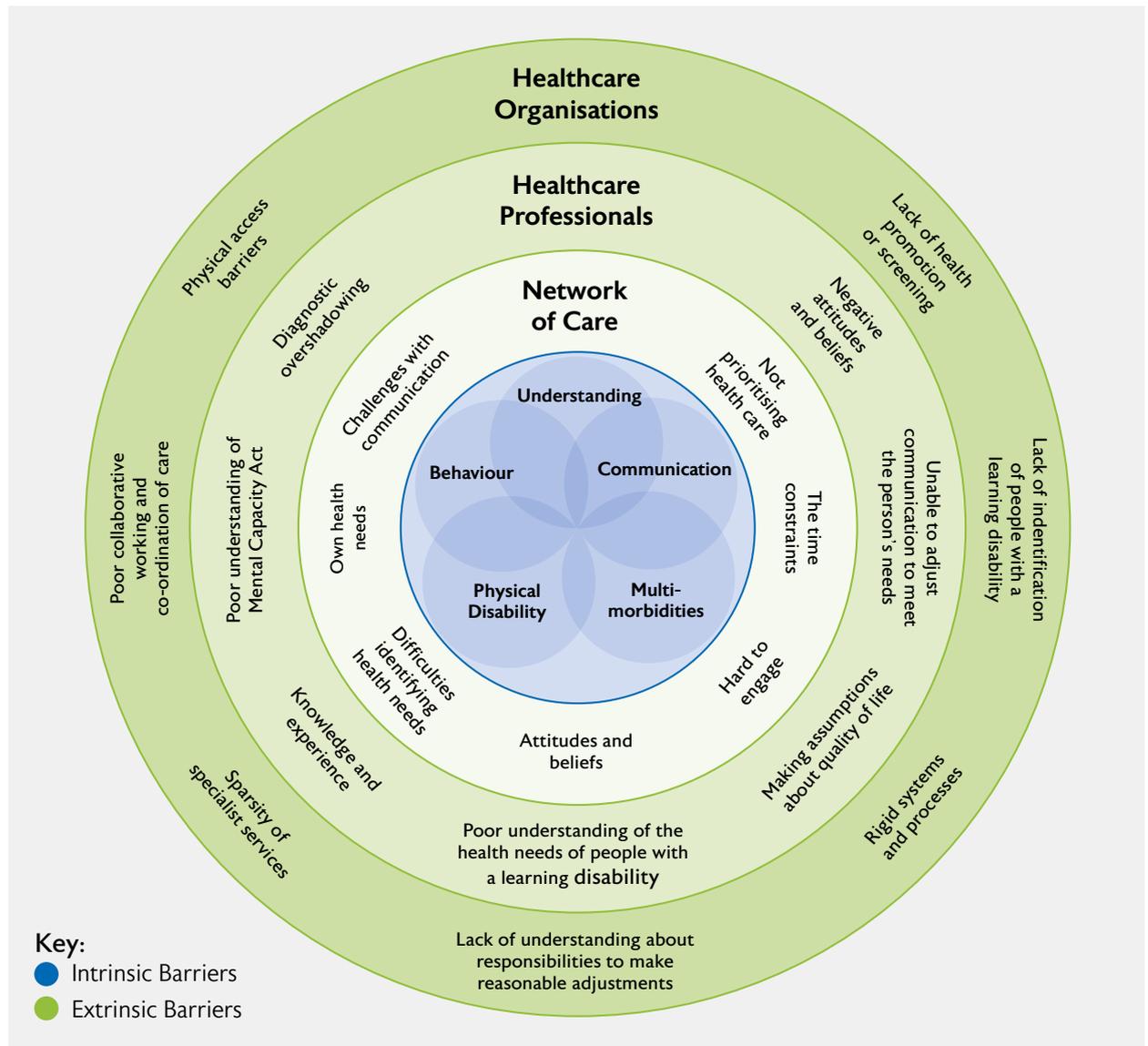
The pathway to providing successful physiotherapy to adults with a learning disability:



Barriers to adults with a learning disability accessing healthcare

There are often a number of barriers that prevent someone with a learning disability gaining equal and successful access to healthcare (Department of Health 2009; Equalities Act 2010; Heslop et al. 2013). They can be categorised into intrinsic and extrinsic. The intrinsic barriers are those related to the person, usually as a result of the individual's communication difficulties, limited understanding and ability to learn new information, physical disability, and complex health background. The extrinsic barriers arise from factors outside of the individual's control such as the person's network of care, the professionals that provide care, and health and social care organisations.

The barriers to providing successful healthcare to adults with a learning disability:



Reasonable Adjustments

All public services, including the health sector, have a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments to overcome potential barriers. Reasonable adjustments can mean making buildings accessible, but also making changes to policies, procedures and staff training to ensure that services work equally well for people with a learning disability. Public sector organisations should not simply wait and respond to difficulties as they emerge, the duty on them is 'anticipatory' (Equality Act, 2010). Most adults with a learning disability will be able to successfully access mainstream services with reasonable adjustments. However, some people will require adjustments that go beyond what is reasonable and possible for mainstream services and will require access to specialist learning disability services.

Standards of practice

The standards of practice aim to improve and standardise the delivery, development and commissioning of specialist physiotherapy to adults with a learning disability across the United Kingdom. The standards of practice are systematically developed statements that were derived through analysis of the available evidence and expert opinion of experienced specialist learning disability physiotherapists gained through a Modified Delphi Technique research study.

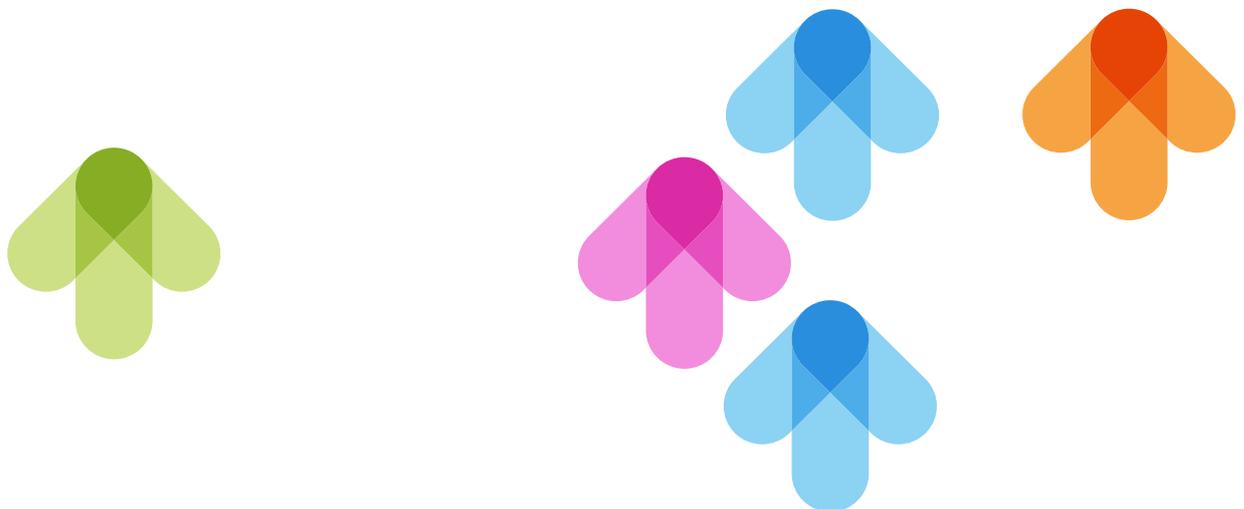
They were developed to:

- provide a **definition** of the role of the specialist learning disability physiotherapist.

- provide best practice guidance that outlines and directs the **essential roles of the specialist learning disability physiotherapist** to improve the physiotherapy health outcomes for all adults with a learning disability.

- explore the **adjustments that specialist learning disability physiotherapists make** to provide successful physiotherapy to adults with a learning disability that go beyond what is reasonable for mainstream services.

- **raise awareness** of the role of the **specialist learning disability physiotherapist** to commissioners, service managers and mainstream health and social care professionals, to ensure that adults with a learning disability have access to specialist physiotherapy.



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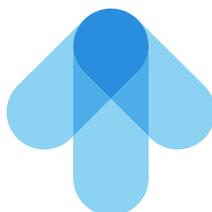
Definition of a learning disability physiotherapist

“ *Learning disability physiotherapists provide specialist assessment, treatment and management to adults with a learning disability whose needs cannot be successfully met by mainstream services, even when reasonable adjustments are made.*

Physiotherapists will work in collaboration with the person, their network of care, mainstream health services, and the multidisciplinary team to enhance, optimise and maintain the person's physical presentation, function and quality of life. ”

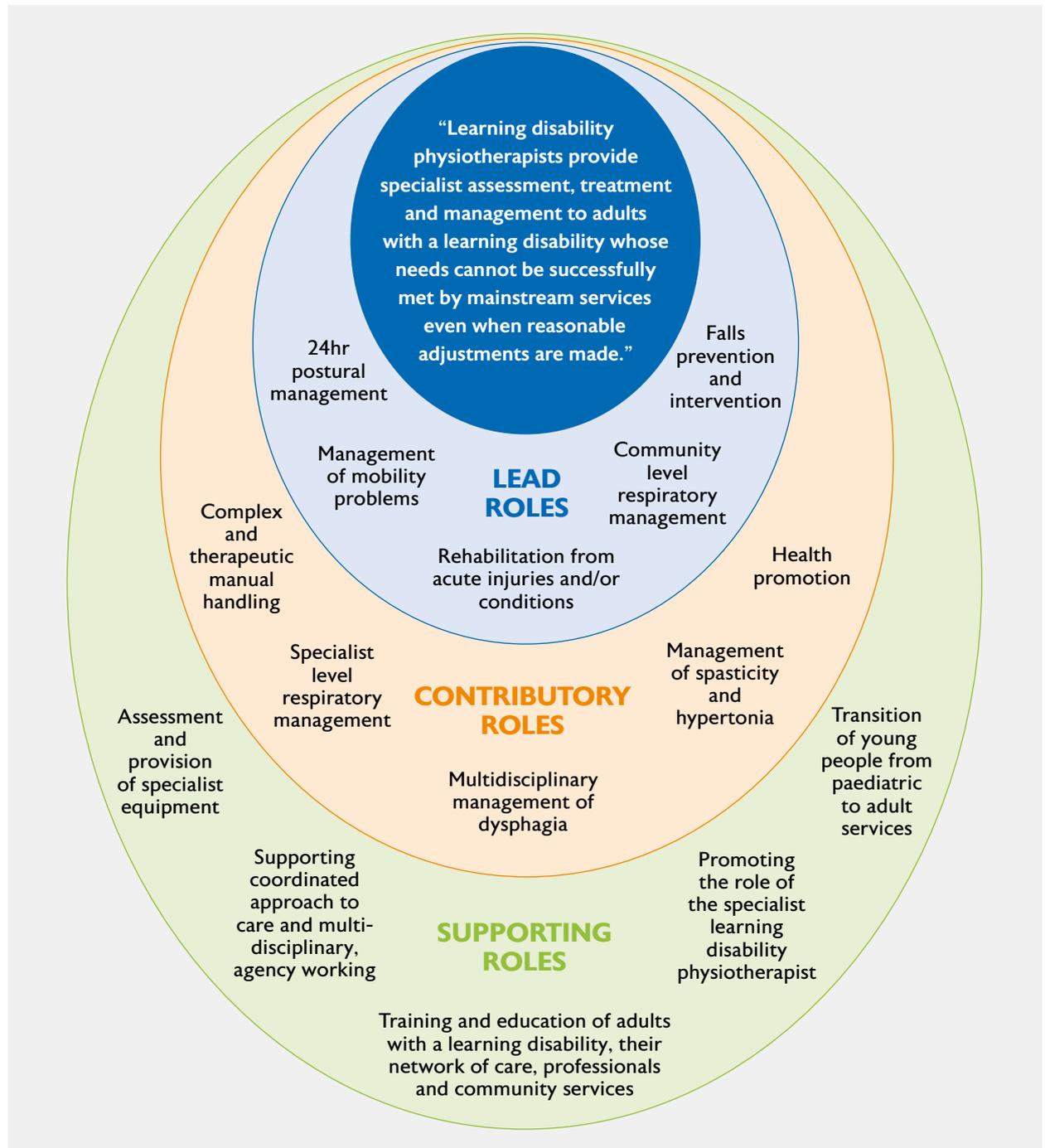
For specialist learning disability physiotherapy service leads and physiotherapists to deliver the new definition it is essential that they

1. Are accessible and equitable to ALL adults with a learning disability and a physiotherapy need that cannot be met successfully by mainstream services even when reasonable adjustments are made.
2. Are based on clinical need, not on an assumed level of a person's learning disability.
3. Make the ADJUSTMENTS required to provide successful physiotherapy to adults with a learning disability that go beyond what is REASONABLE and POSSIBLE for mainstream services.
4. Support positive access to and responses from mainstream physiotherapy and relevant healthcare services.
5. Develop links; open lines of communication; and direct referral pathways with local health and social care services critical to the delivery of physiotherapy services to adults with a learning disability.



The Roles of Specialist Learning Disability Physiotherapy Services

The provision of specialist learning disability physiotherapy can be categorised into Lead, Contributory and Supporting roles each with five further facets to each domain. For specialist learning disability physiotherapy services to successfully meet the physiotherapy needs of adults with a learning disability it is essential they deliver on these roles.



Lead Roles	Contributory Roles	Supporting Roles
<p>These are the roles that are ESSENTIAL for the specialist learning disability physiotherapist to take responsibility for delivering.</p>	<p>To deliver these roles the specialist learning disability physiotherapist will contribute to and work in collaboration with members of the multidisciplinary team or mainstream services.</p>	<p>These are the roles that underpin the successful provision of the lead and contributory roles of the specialist learning disability physiotherapist.</p>

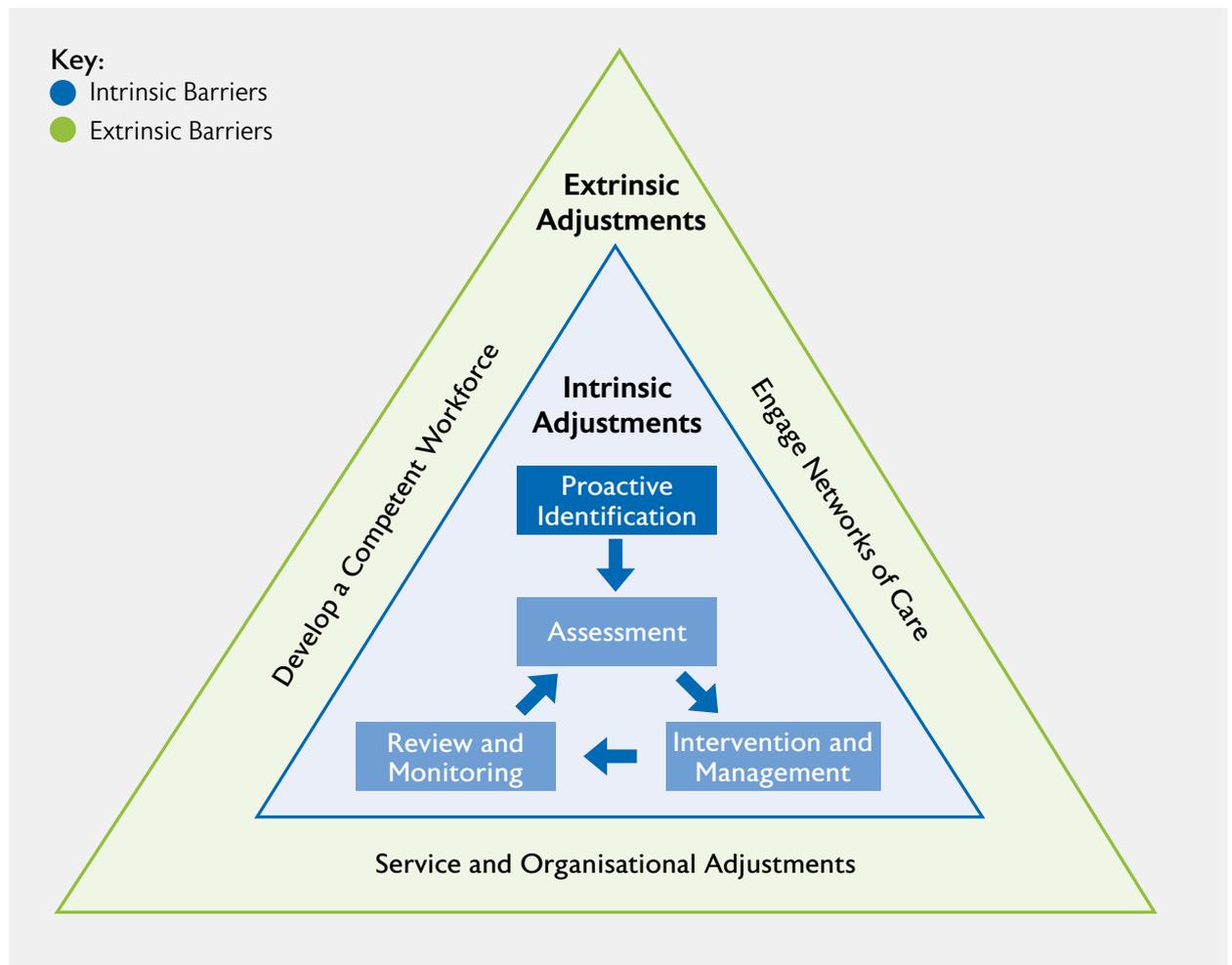
Specialist adjustments

The unique attributes of the specialist learning disability physiotherapist.

It is essential that specialist learning disability physiotherapists make the adjustments required to provide successful physiotherapy to adults with a learning disability. Providing these adjustments requires specialist knowledge and skills; and a model of working which facilitates the development of relationships with the adult with a learning disability and their network of care. Adjustments are required at a strategic level to develop a competent network of care and local workforce, as well as the systems to support adults with a learning disability to access the healthcare they need in a timely manner.

These levels of adjustment are not possible or reasonable for mainstream services and it is essential they are delivered by specialist learning disability physiotherapy services to achieve successful outcomes.

The areas where specialist learning disability physiotherapists make adjustments to provide successful physiotherapy:



Intrinsic adjustments include

Proactive Identification:

1. Proactively identify, manage and monitor adults with a learning disability who are at high risk of developing physiotherapy needs.

Assessment:

1. Offer individually tailored assessments over a prolonged period with multiple contacts that consider the person's diagnosis; learning disability; social circumstances; behaviour; specific risk factors; drug history; and past medical history.
2. Complete assessments that are flexible, adaptable and creative across multiple environments.
3. Conduct subjective assessment using proxy reporters and linking information from different sources.
4. Adapt mainstream assessments to meet the specific needs of the adult with a learning disability.

Intervention and Management:

1. Offer a holistic approach to disability management which takes a long term view of rehabilitation, intervention and management.
2. Develop individually tailored management plans that take into consideration the person's learning disability, complex physical disability, behaviour, home environment, social circumstances, daily routines and activities.
3. Disseminate and delegate management plans that are written in an accessible format to ensure that they can be understood and implemented.
4. Offer specialist interventions to address physiotherapy goals which are creative, fun and enjoyable to improve compliance and outcomes.
5. Support a positive risk management approach to ensure that the needs of the adult with a learning disability are met in a person-centred manner, that maximises personal choice and quality of life as well as evidence based intervention.

Review and Monitoring:

Adults with a learning disability are often unable to express when their needs have changed or when they experience side effects of treatments or management plans. They may also be unable to seek medical support and are reliant on others to identify and meet their health needs. Changes can be very subtle making it difficult for the person's network of care to detect. Therefore:

1. Provide regular monitoring and reviews for adults with a learning disability in a timely manner depending on the level of risk; and the complexity of the person's disability, associated health problems and social circumstances.

Extrinsic adjustments include

Engage the person's network of care:

1. Invest time into developing relationships with the person's network of care to provide successful physiotherapy.
2. Develop physiotherapy management plans that are incorporated into daily routines considering their impact on the person's network of care.

Develop a competent workforce:

1. Provide training and education to the person's network of care, the local community workforce and healthcare professionals to improve the physiotherapy management for adults with a learning disability.

Service level adjustments:

1. Offer a model of service delivery which facilitates extended episodes of care; flexible working patterns; continuity of care; and a proactive approach.
2. Develop relationships and pathways with relevant local healthcare services critical to the delivery of successful physiotherapy to adults with a learning disability.
3. Deliver bespoke learning disability physiotherapy services where mainstream services are not available or accessible. Such as 24 hour postural management pathways or a falls prevention and intervention service.
4. Provide a co-ordinated approach to care where adults with a learning disability and their network of care are unable to navigate multiple health professionals and services.

Knowledge and Skills of the Specialist Learning Disability Physiotherapist

- Learning Disability Physiotherapists are specialists in:
 - Making the adjustments required to provide successful physiotherapy to adults with a learning disability.
 - Supporting positive access to and responses from mainstream physiotherapy and relevant healthcare services.
 - The specific areas of physiotherapy that are critical to meeting the needs of adults with a learning disability. Such as 24hr postural management, falls intervention and prevention, and the management of mobility problems.
- Learning Disability Physiotherapists have general knowledge and skills in a broad range of aspects of physiotherapy and other areas of healthcare.
- Learning Disability Physiotherapists are versatile in applying their specialist knowledge to meet the physiotherapy needs of an individual and will seek specialist support where indicated.

Conclusion



Specialist Learning disability physiotherapists make the adjustments required to provide successful physiotherapy to people with a learning disability that go beyond what is reasonable and possible for mainstream services. This makes physiotherapists an essential part of the community learning disability team and critical to meeting the health and physiotherapy needs of adults with a learning disability. Either, through supporting positive access to and responses from mainstream physiotherapy and relevant health services; or by providing direct assessment, treatment and management.



There is widespread evidence and opinion that specialist learning disability physiotherapy has a positive impact on the health outcomes; quality of care; and experiences of adults with a learning disability and their care network, as well as reducing the cost for health and social care. To deliver these outcomes it is essential that community learning disability teams are **appropriately resourced and staffed** to ensure that people with a learning disability are accessing and receiving the specialist physiotherapy they require to meet their needs.

“ *It is the researcher’s belief that proactive specialist learning disability physiotherapy can deliver high-quality cost-effective interventions that are person centred and needs led.* ”



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