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On "The human movement system: our professional identity ..." Sahrman SA. *Phys Ther.* 2014;94:1034–1042.

Howard L. Nelson

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Letters to the Editor

On “The human movement system: our professional identity...” Sahrman SA. *Phys Ther.* 2014;94:1034–1042.

Sahrman’s perspective paper¹ is an inspiring call to action to take seriously the vision statement made by APTA’s House of Delegates. That vision has the potential to enable physical therapists to become the medical experts in evaluating, diagnosing, and treating movement-related problems.

It is extraordinary that she and her colleagues have been able to describe a new physiological system of the body, the human movement system, which abides by principles based in the basic sciences of anatomy, physiology, kinesiology, and biomechanics.

As the movement system becomes widely recognized and accepted as a legitimate and important physiological system of the body, physical therapists will become the “go-to” professionals to treat movement-related problems. Our identity as a profession will be more unified.

However, this can happen only when our physical therapist professional education focuses on how to better evaluate normal versus abnormal motion and how to diagnose movement dysfunctions. We will not be recognized as true independent specialists if we are treating conditions based on another professional’s diagnosis.

Physical therapy has the opportunity to fill a void in the care of musculoskeletal problems. Medical professionals are spending less and less time observing patients to find the mechanical causes of orthopedic conditions. Diagnostic tests have now become the examination tool of choice. In addition,

most physicians are not trained in analyzing movement. We need to fill this void by being recognized as the professionals best equipped to diagnose and treat movement impairments.

When asked, “Can the way one moves and uses his or her body result in injury or pain?” patients, doctors, and physical therapists all answer, “Yes.” The obvious questions, which have never been adequately answered, are: “If that is true, how does it happen?” and “How can it be treated?” The movement system aims to answer those questions.

My intention for writing this response to Sahrman’s article is to call attention to the importance of her work and what she is saying. I encourage our profession to promote and advocate for the movement system to become widely recognized by the medical community and the world at large. I believe that by doing so, we—as a profession—can significantly improve the outcomes of the care we provide.

Howard L. Nelson

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Reference

1 Sahrman SA. The human movement system: our professional identity. *Phys Ther.* 2014;94:1034–1042.

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Author Response

Nelson’s positive response¹ to the information presented in my perspective paper² is very reassuring. He has highlighted several important aspects of practice today that

support the value of promoting the identity of physical therapists as movement system specialists. Although both the public and other health care professionals acknowledge that movement, particularly as related to sports, can cause injury, the progressive and preventive nature of that injury is not well understood. Many articles published in the non-medical press also have stated that physicians are not performing physical examinations; nonetheless, they are analyzing movement. Yet, as stated in the perspective paper, based on the literature, the orthopedic community is increasingly aware of movement inducing the pain problem rather than a patho-anatomical structure.

As Nelson stated, physical therapists need to become the “go-to” professionals for diagnosing and treating movement-induced tissue injuries. Thus, we have to establish both our diagnostic expertise based on movement analysis of these problems and our treatment effectiveness. I also am convinced that recognition as diagnosticians requires specific labels that are within our scope of practice and that are widely used by the profession. I could not agree more that every therapist must in every way possible convey to the public and to other professionals that there is a movement system and that we are the professionals who have the greatest knowledge of this system.

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