Gaining Environmental Sustainability in Physical Therapy
While Maintaining Original Goals

In many fields like Physical Therapy, the direct purpose of the career doesn’t do much harm to the environment, but the process on the way to the main goals can have a huge impact on sustainability for the future. Specifically in PT, common practices like weight barring workouts, massage, and balance techniques don’t have anything to do with the environment at all. Despite this, everything that comes with it does, such as the work place environment and necessary equipment.

Work Place Environments
In Physical Therapy, the best results will come when a patient is comfortable and able to execute the therapies in their own desired way. This means large space for activities as well as space for privacy, whatever is preferred by the patient. Physical therapists hold business in hospitals, office buildings, and private clinics. In this business environment there is a large issue with the use of office supplies, and technology used to keep the business up and running.

Necessary Equipment
To promote the best possible healing for a wide variety of patients there are various medical, training and therapy equipment necessary. This variety in different types of equipment provides the ability to cater to personal needs, preferences and/or disabilities. For example a patient with balance damage will best succeed with stationary machines to eliminate the risk of falling, patients with weight barring issues thrive in water therapy and athletes trying to get back to their sport require the specific equipment to stimulate their desired sport environment.

Steps Towards Gaining Environmental Sustainability
All of the use of “stuff” in the business environment adds up to a large impact on the environment, which can be easily changed by reducing, recycling and/or reusing.

Reduce
First, the best way to ensure something doesn’t impact the environment is to not use it at all, with reducing the next two steps are cut out completely. An easy step to reduce is cutting down on the use of paper. Having appointment reminders, receipts, notices etc. sent using email instead of post mail cuts down dramatically on the use of paper. If something must be printed, making sure the printer is set to print both sides will cut use in half.
In lounge areas of the office with senseless use of paper/plastic utensils, single serve coffee makers and plastic bottles can be a bigger issue than the office supplies because it is so easy to change yet nobody does. Having washable cups/plates/utensils, using a filtered water pitcher, and using a large brewing coffee pot instead will eliminate all the unnecessary waste.

Recycle
Step two involves recycling, if the materials are needed, then the next best thing to do is recycle after use. For the most success in recycling it is best to start a program in the office so everyone is aware of the initiative for a greener environment. With a program in place the appropriate receptacles would be in place to dispose of different items such as paper, plastic, cardboard etc. Despite the impact ink cartridges have on the environment they are often overlooked when it comes to recycling. Cartridges from printers, fax machines and copiers can be recycled and/or refilled. According to A Greener Refill, by recycling cartridges 40,000 tons of metal and plastic is saved from landfills each year.

Reuse
The third step pertains to reusing items necessary for the business and/or equipment, which A Greener Refill refers to as “the highest form of recycling”. Quick changes that can be made include rechargeable batteries, towels instead of paper products in therapies, and use backs from previously used sheets of paper. A great way to start off a green business is to get used supplies from the beginning. It’s quite simple to add a new coat of paint to older furniture or using weights and machines with some scratches. In the end they will both serve the same purpose as a new one. Another aspect of this to keep in mind is to not throw away your used furniture and equipment, many charitable organizations and/or less fortunate families that would be happy to take these items to reuse for themselves. Extended the life on used items keeps more trash from polluting the environment in the trash.
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