

The Sportscomp Erasmus+ Project: Higher Education to Improve Competency in Sports Physiotherapy

Carlo Ramponi, PT^{1,2}, Armi Hirvonen, MBA³, Mati Arend, PhD⁴, Eleni Kapreli, PT, PhD⁵, Prof. Dr. Jo Verschueren, PT, PhD, MSc^{6,7}

¹ Kinè Rehab Center, ² IFSPT Sportscomp Coordinator, ³ Jamk University of Applied Sciences, ⁴ University of Tartu, ⁵ UTH SportsComp Coordinator, University of Thessaly, ⁶ Vrije Universiteit Brussel, ⁷ VUB Sportscomp Coordinator

<https://doi.org/10.26603/001c.92319>

International Journal of Sports Physical Therapy

Vol. 19, Issue 2, 2024

One of the most important milestones of the International Federation of Sports Physical Therapy (IFSPT), a specialty group of the World Physiotherapy (WP) group, was the creation of the Sports Physiotherapy Competencies and Standards document. This statement, finalized by an international panel of experts almost twenty years ago, under The European Union-funded Sports Physiotherapy for All (SPA) project, describes effective professional behaviours and integrates specific knowledge, skills and attitudes in the context of practice. These competencies provide a basis for policy development, enable quality assurance activities and facilitate individual professional development.

OVERVIEW

In August 2022 at the Fourth World Congress of Sports Physical Therapy, the IFSPT research committee held a meeting with interested member organizations (MOs) to discuss the future of sports physiotherapy. During the meeting, the attendees suggested updating the sports physiotherapy (SPT) competencies through an international project, based on a global need for expanding the role of the sports physiotherapist. This project would also support each MO by providing educational opportunities to its members. Thanks to the vision of the IFSPT research committee and under the guidance of its members, Ben Waller (Finland), Jo Verschueren (Belgium), Maria Constantinou (Australia) and Luciana De Michelis Mendonça (Brazil, IFSPT President) the IFSPT established an international consortium tasked with building a strong Erasmus+ application to the European Union to support its goal.

CONSORTIUM

The project consortium consists of five organisations: Jamk University of Applied Sciences (Jamk, Finland), University of Tartu (UT, Estonia), Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB, Belgium), University of Thessaly (UTH, Greece), and the International Federation of Sports Physical Therapy (IFSPT, Switzerland).

In September 2023, the new consortium announced that the Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnership Project, Higher education to improve competency in Sports Physiotherapy (SportsComp), was granted funding for an international project lasting three years.

As stated by the assessors, "...the involvement of and the role of the IFSPT (CH) is pivotal in bringing the results of the project to a broad range of international institutions to

use, and could impact sports physiotherapy education and the profession globally." It continued "...The project has very good potential to positively impact its participants and participating organisations, as well as their wider communities...". In addition, thanks to the credibility of the other partners, they also stated that "...The profile, experience and the activities of the participating organisations are relevant for the field, the application is clear and very well presented. Participants have significant experience in the field(s) as well as strong evidence-based competencies and skills. The applicants are strong groups with the clear ability to translate research-based approaches to practical level solutions..."

The SportsComp project, coordinated by Jamk, began on 1 September 2023, and is divided into five Work Packages (WPs), which focus on the long-term competence development of the academia, students, and professionals by updating sports physiotherapy competencies. The project enhances international collaboration in sports physiotherapy, and lifelong learning, and supports the digital competencies of the project target groups.

PROJECT WORK PACKAGES (WPS)

The Work Package 1 (WP1), "Project Management and Coordination," is led by the project Coordinator, Jamk. WP 1 includes the Project Management Group (PMG), which coordinates and monitors the activities across the WPs and solves any possible challenges, which may influence project implementation. The Quality Assurance Team (QA Team) is also part of this WP and its work focuses on quality planning, assessment, monitoring and follow-up. The Project Implementation Plan and the Quality Assurance Plan are the two most important outputs of this WP, which help the

project experts to implement the project according to set quality standards, timeline and settled objectives.

The consortium has recently turned its focus to the Work Package 2 (WP2), led by VUB. This WP, “Updating the sports physiotherapy competencies”, began in September 2023. Part 1 of this WP is a Delphi study survey, which aims to update the current international sports physiotherapy competencies using input from all global member organisations of the IFSPT and to align them with the competency profile of WP and the CanMEDS competency framework. Part 2 is a focus group, which is planned to comprehensively understand the role and significance of different competencies of modern sports physiotherapists. The interview data of Part 2 will come from at least three main groups: athletes, athlete support personnel, sporting or national healthcare organizations that use the services of sports physiotherapists. Stakeholders will include National Olympic committees, international sport federations, para-athlete organizations, and athletes and support staff representing different socioeconomic statuses.

Work package 3 (WP3), “E-learning courses in sports physiotherapy”, led by UTH, focuses on developing three (3) sports physiotherapy e-learning courses based on the competencies from WP 2 to ensure continuous sports physiotherapy competence development of the target groups in the long term at European Qualifications Framework (EQF) level 7.

The second objective of the WP 3 is to support different learners and learning scenarios in sports physiotherapy by creating learner-centered, innovative teaching, and learning materials based on current evidence and findings utilizing digitalization. Developed courses also support blended learning and hybrid learning, including other teaching and learning scenarios supporting the strengthened role of sports physiotherapists according to the working life needs.

The main objective of the Work Package 4 (WP4), “Implementation of e-learning courses” led by Jamk, is to assess the quality of the developed courses in practice. The quality check is done by implementing (piloting) two of the developed e-learning courses from WP 3, and amending one e-learning course based on course feedback. This is to ensure that the courses match with the updated competencies in WP 2 and that the developed contents contribute to long-term competence development. WP 4 collates the key outputs and findings from the implementation WPs into a Tutor Guide, which is published at the end of the WP.

The objective of Work Package 5 (WP5), “Communication and Dissemination,” guides the communication and dissemination activities of the project. WP 5 is led by IFSPT, and it aims to offer information on the project and ensure that the project outputs and results are communicated to stakeholders and wider audiences in a timely, accessible and quality manner. On-going updates regarding project activities, documentation and reached results are published on social media, project website and partners’ websites.

Communication and Dissemination activities are guided by the Dissemination Plan. WP 5 provides global visibility of the project contributing to enhanced knowledge regarding sports physiotherapy and continuous competence de-

velopment. WP 5 will produce two physical results: a) two publications (a consensus paper and a paper on the role of the sports physiotherapist); and, b) a strategic plan for long-term collaboration.

EXPECTED PROJECT RESULTS

- Updated competencies of sports physiotherapy based on the EQF level 7, and the redefined role of the sports physiotherapist according to the CanMEDS model. This is in line with the WP educational framework.
- Three innovative e-learning courses in sports physiotherapy at EQF 7 level (3 x 5 ECTS credits). Courses will be integrated to partner higher education institutions’ curricula once finalised. The courses will be developed based on the newly-established core competencies, which will be globally applicable, irrespective of context in sports physiotherapy. Two of the courses are to be piloted with feedback and assessment, with one course updated. Courses will be promoted forward to students, academia and clinical professionals to ensure on-going competence development.
- Digital teaching and learning materials and content to support lifelong learning and professional development of different target groups and learners.
- A Tutor Guide to support competence development, learning and teaching for the academia, professionals, and learners to be used in different environments and settings to facilitate the developed skills and knowledge towards end-users and beneficiaries.
- A report on the competency update and e-learning materials, which includes two publications: the update in competency, and roles of sports physiotherapy around the world.

MEETINGS

To support sustainability and green transition, most of the project activities and tasks are carried out by on-line means. However, the committee has scheduled five face-to-face meetings over the project duration of three years.

The project Kick-off meeting was held at Jamk, Finland, 25-27 October, 2023. Over the three days, experts focused on building the implementation details for the five WPs with the finalisation of administrative, communication and dissemination actions to be carried out throughout the project duration. In addition, experts began discussing the creation of e-learning courses in sports physiotherapy and continued co-developing the ongoing activities to update the sports physiotherapy competencies at EQF level 7, which is due to be finalised in summer 2024. The next project consortium meeting is planned in Brussels, hosted by VUB in April 2024. The following consortium meetings will be hosted by the UTH in autumn 2024, by UT in summer 2025, and by IFSPT in summer 2026. The last project face-to-face meeting held by IFSPT will be the project Final Seminar focusing on disseminating project results to different stakeholders and wider audiences internationally.

IN SUMMARY

The SportsComp project increases the quality of sports physiotherapy education and professionalism through competence development. The Project enhances the excellence of sports physiotherapy, physiotherapy, and rehabilitation education, and supports the improvement of European and global health care and sport systems. The SportsComp project experts know the relevance of the final aims, and are enthusiastic and honored to work on achieving them. It is known that the SportsComp project will generate untold advantages to the global sports physiotherapy world.

For further information on the project...



Co-funded by
the European Union

Armi Hirvonen

Project Manager, Jamk University of Applied Sciences

Armi.Hirvonen@jamk.fi

Sanna Sihvonen

Project Manager, Jamk University of Applied Sciences

Sanna.Sihvonen@jamk.fi

Eleni Kapreli

UTH coordinator, University of Thessaly

ekapreli@uth.gr

Jo Verschueren

VUB coordinator, Vrije Universiteit Brussel

jo.verschueren@vub.be

Carlo Ramponi

IFSPT Representative, Project Management Group

vicepresident@ifspt.org

Project webpage link:

https://ifspt.org/erasmusplus_sportscomp/

© The Author(s)



This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CCBY-NC-4.0). View this license's legal deed at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0> and legal code at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode> for more information.