Background and Purpose: One of the American Physical Therapy Association’s core values is social responsibility, which includes behavioral indicators such as advocacy, volunteerism, and community leadership in the areas of societal health and wellness. The purpose of this study was to explore attitudes and barriers to volunteering as expressed by the following three cohort groups: student physical therapists, physical therapists with fewer than 5 years experience, and physical therapists with greater than 5 years experience.

Methods: A qualitative research design was employed. Using purposive sampling, eight participants were recruited from clinical settings within the metropolitan area and St. Catherine University. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to generate an accurate, rich description of volunteerism from the perspective of physical therapists and physical therapy students. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and sent to participants for member-checking. Themes and sub-themes were identified individually and then further developed by the researchers using a collaborative process. Credibility and transferability were addressed through the use of thick description, triangulation, peer debriefings, and member checking.

Results: Three common themes emerged from the interviews: professionalism, barriers to volunteering, and factors that facilitate volunteering. Within professionalism, five sub-themes were identified: empathy, caring, trustworthiness, thoroughness, and accountability. Barriers to volunteering included time, location, cost, health, and ability to identify opportunities. Factors that facilitated volunteering included fitting the individual, required hours, socialization, helping others, and intrinsic benefits.

Conclusion: Physical therapists and student physical therapists involved in this study identified facilitating factors and barriers to volunteering. Despite the identified barriers, most participants viewed volunteerism as a social responsibility of the profession. In order to facilitate volunteering among physical therapists, organizations should provide clear explanations of volunteer opportunities, as well as the expectations of the volunteer. Organizations can also benefit from presenting volunteer opportunities as a chance to gain skills and promote the profession.

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