

The role of physical therapy during operational deployment: the Belgian experience

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Since 1993, military physical therapists (PT) support Belgian military personnel during operational deployments on the Role 1 to 3 levels. The first aim of their interventions was to ensure the physical readiness of the deployed forces. Because of the high incidence of musculoskeletal injuries during, there was increasing interest for deployed military PT. Gradually, military PT became a valuable asset in the management of musculoskeletal injuries, reducing lost duty days and the need for medical evacuation. Because of this evolution, the Belgian Medical Component intensified the recruitment of military PT. During almost three decades, military PT delivered support in diverging environments and situations. Deployment in different theatres, in national and multi-national context, lead to diverse challenges and obliged physical therapists to change their approach in function of the demands. In order to facilitate rapid return to duty, the introduction of manual therapy has shown his advantages. Beside early treatment and evaluation, there is growing attention for injury prevention and performance optimization for specific groups. We can state that skilled musculoskeletal PT play an important role in supporting the operational readiness of the Belgian Soldier during operational deployment.