



Media release
For immediate release

**Poor coordination affects students' ability to learn:
Physiotherapists play key role in early identification and treatment of children with
prevalent movement skill disorder**

Ottawa (Sept. 16, 2011) — Canadian students are back in the classroom, but some will find the experience a challenge. It's estimated that as many as six per cent* of school age children have poor coordination that affects their ability to learn. This under-recognized motor-based learning disability is called Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD) and Canadian physiotherapists play a key role in the early identification, assessment and management of the condition.

DCD is difficult to diagnose — it affects patterns of motor behaviour, but there are no medical or neurological conditions which could explain the poor coordination. Children with DCD appear awkward or clumsy, and they have difficulty performing common everyday tasks which can interfere with school performance and regular daily activities.

“Children with DCD may have problems tying their shoes, buttoning buttons, or catching a ball,” says physiotherapist Lisa Rivard, a member of the Canadian Physiotherapy Association, who works at CanChild Centre for Childhood Disability Research at McMaster University. “Physiotherapists help children learn how to direct their body to accomplish the task at hand.”

Teachers are often the first to notice trouble with fine motor skills, like an inability to properly form printed letters or draw objects, but children with DCD may also have difficulties with recreational activities, such as jumping rope or learning to ride a bicycle. The route to DCD diagnosis can be long, says Rivard, so early intervention is critical.

“Usually families have some inkling that something's not quite right with their child,” says Rivard. “If that suspicion's there, then it's important to see a health professional, such as a physiotherapist, as soon as possible to learn strategies to manage the motor difficulties.”

Physiotherapists are skilled in the assessment of body mechanics and movement patterns, providing valuable information to help physicians diagnose DCD. Early physiotherapy intervention can help a child with DCD to succeed at challenging physical activities by teaching movement skills and improving strength, flexibility, agility and endurance.

“As physiotherapists our goal is to give children with DCD and their families the information they need to be able to overcome future challenges on their own, outside of the clinic environment,” says Rivard.

To find a physiotherapist with experience treating children, visit www.physiotherapy.ca, or to learn more about DCD, visit CanChild Centre for Child Disability Research.

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**Figure courtesy of the American Psychiatric Association*

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