Physiotherapy Worldwide, the next five years
Physiotherapy
A vision for the future

Physiotherapy, as a profession has grown exponentially in recent decades in terms of professional and academic maturity in many countries and in terms of professional autonomy and responsibility in some. In addition physiotherapy as a profession has begun to put down roots in some countries where it ever existed before, for example, in Russia and China. The challenges for the whole profession over the next few years are great. Achieving degree status for physiotherapists worldwide is imperative as only with undergraduate research training can the new generation of physiotherapists be thoroughly prepared for practicing in an evidence based health services culture. In such cultures they will inevitably be required to strengthen evidence based provision by contributing to research activities and utilising forthcoming evidence in practice. Increasingly health care commissioners will be requiring professions to demonstrate that they are evidence based and are utilising evidence in everyday practice so as to achieve high quality care provision. Without adequate research training physiotherapists will find it difficult to carry out own account research and to analyse and interpret existing published research findings. With undergraduate degree provision in place comes the opportunity for the growth of profession specific masters and doctoral level education developments. Each national physiotherapy group must begin to develop research cultures in practice and in academia using whatever means available, for example, journal clubs or research support groups. This is imperative especially as the evidence based practice ethos grows within other profession.

It is also important that physiotherapists move gradually to more autonomous practice and away from medical prescription. This together with evidence based practice will ensure that patients receive the most appropriate care and it can reduce the frustrations that many physiotherapists feel in some parts of the world in terms of their perceived lack of autonomy.

Physiotherapists must also become more politically aware and work at collecting good quality baseline evidence to inform service delivery for example, utilising standardised data collection methods and carrying out audit processes so that they can characterise their service provision and their outcomes, but also these methods will help to inform much needed research questions in the field. We need to focus our research efforts on strengthening our treatment approaches to key conditions which sit within national and international health agendas for example: Chronic long term conditions, Healthy ageing, Global health conditions eg; smoking related, HIV, aids etc, Obesity and Public Health. Importantly physiotherapists need to recognise the role that they can have in maintaining and improving public health, creatively finding outlets for the dissemination of physiotherapy public health activities both inside and outside the clinical environment. We also need in this context to utilise our core skills more effectively, for example exercise and communication skills. Finally the more physiotherapy groups can work together the better. There is a great strength in numbers and much more can be achieved by moving forward together. Many of the topics covered in this editorial will be the focus of presentations at WCPT 2011, to be held in Amsterdam. As Chair of the International Scientific Committee, I very much look forward to seeing and hearing from many of you at the congress and being part of any discussions that we have at the congress with regard to moving the research within the physiotherapy profession forward together.

Good wishes to all my colleagues in France.

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