

EDITORIAL

by J C Beenhakker

A very successful Congress is once again behind us. Members of the congress committees are to be congratulated on the high standard of papers delivered and workshops provided and on the smooth running of the academic and social events, in spite of the many behind the scene hassles.

In the opening address, Professor J Allan stressed the need for continuing education and of the importance of such congresses as well as for regular workshops and courses. All practitioners and teachers need periodic refresher programmes because our practice is constantly changing and we need to look ahead to ensure the relevance of our profession.

Professor Allan warned that we need to act on what we have learned and ensure that the newly acquired ideas are not forgotten. He stressed that self education is not a passive matter but requires the critical application of one's mind to the specific subject. Self study is accompanied by "wondering, pondering, dreaming and speculating" in attempting to clarify problems.

In the past, the Editorial Board has urged its readers to undertake clinical trials and to write these up so that this knowledge may benefit other practitioners. As Professor Allan says, practice and study should go hand in hand and that by improving one's observation and recording skills and increasing our understanding of what we are doing, the standard of clinical practice will be raised.

The pre and post congress workshops were well attended and participants gained a great deal from the contact with the overseas visitors. Besides honing their technical skills in Professor Rocabado's two workshops, participants were able to improve their practice in respiratory care through Dr Sue Jenkins. Educationalists, both academic and clinical, were once again given new ideas by Mrs Shula Werner while the important area of community-based rehabilitation was addressed by Mrs Helen Myezwa. However, the majority of the papers and workshops were presented

by local speakers who are to be congratulated on the high levels achieved in the fields of Education, Clinical Practice, Community Health and Management.

The 20th General Meeting of the National Council preceded congress and once again lively discussion and debate ensued. The Council was opened by Professor E T Mokgokong, Principal and Vice Chancellor of Medunsa. Professor Mokgokong echoed our feelings when he suggested that we should not be classified as Allied Medical or Supplementary Health Workers as physiotherapists are professionals in their own rights, and not allied to any other group.

He outlined some facts about our present health care system which is characterised by fragmentation, underfunding, unequal distribution, lack of equity and aggressive privatisation. For example, although the ten homelands comprise 44% of the total population of South Africa, they were only allocated 29% of the national health budget. Professor Mokgokong felt that the root cause of our difficulties in health care delivery is the lack of clarity on health care planning and quoted the divergent policies of the government, ANC and others. He supports a model of health care which entrenches central state control and regional health boards which would regulate health and social services from primary through to tertiary services. He finally urged physiotherapists to consider their future role in health care and to ensure that we remain relevant.

Many important resolutions were approved at Council which will hopefully steer the Society on a new path and an improved way of functioning. It is trusted that Council members were stimulated by the reports read and discussions held, and will be eager to take these back to their Branches and Groups so that all members of the Society may share in these deliberations. It is only by communicating with one another that we will build understanding and tolerance of our various views and diverse cultures.

A professional society which changes with the times and meets its commitments to its members and shares with them will be a vibrant one and can only gain in strength.

The Editorial Board wishes the Chairman, Mrs Frances Glauber and her National Executive Committee vision to see what needs to be done and the courage to make changes which are in keeping with the needs of its members and to society in general.

WORLD TRENDS IN PHYSIOTHERAPY RESEARCH IN THE 1980S

by Jeanette Mitchell

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The value of research in the physiotherapy profession has been emphasised more, as the professional and scientific role of physiotherapy is questioned^{1,2,3,4,5,6,7}.

Research is published regularly in physiotherapy journals. In order to follow the world trends in physiotherapy research, from 1980 to 1989, a survey of journals of five English-speaking countries, namely Physiotherapy (Britain), Physical Therapy (America), Physiotherapy Canada, the Australian Journal of Physiotherapy and the South African Journal of Physiotherapy, was carried out. These journals were taken to be representative of those most commonly read by physiotherapists, although it is understood that not all research conducted may be reported in them. Only the principal papers published were reviewed, with particular reference to the subject, academic qualifications of first authors and research design used.

A total of 2178 papers were reviewed. The most commonly reported research concerned the musculoskeletal system/therapy (23% of papers) and education/administration (19%). Little research in paediatrics (8%) and geriatrics (2%) was published. This

is surprising as both topics are related to community-based physiotherapy in which there is a growing interest.

Although many of the first authors were still physiotherapists with a diploma only (16% of papers), more first authors had a physiotherapy qualification plus an honours or masters degree (15%) or were post-graduates other than physiotherapists (19%).

Fifty-one per cent of papers were descriptive while 13% and 23% involved clinical trials and experimental trials respectively. Thirteen per cent of the articles were reports of surveys carried out. A total of 35% of the papers reported the use of the statistical analysis of data.

This study demonstrated an awareness of the need for and attempt at obtaining higher academic standards of physiotherapy research, in the 1980s, in these countries.

1. Basmajian JV. Research or retrench: The rehabilitation professions challenged. *Physical Therapy* 1975;55:607-610.
2. Basmajian JV. Professional survival: The research role in physiotherapy. *Physical Therapy* 1977;57:283-285.
3. Campbell EDR. Introduction: The purpose of research. *Physiotherapy* 1970;56:480-481.
4. Fowler WM. Physical therapy and research. *Physical Therapy* 1969;49:977-982.
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6. Lee JM. Why aren't you doing research? *Physiotherapy* 1978;64:149-150.
7. Van Leewen RM. The physiotherapist and research. *Physiotherapy* 1970;56:497.