

patient care which so often tends to fall by the way in this busy world of ours.

References

- Khan, A., Howroyd, H. A. (1976). Physiotherapy care audit and peer review. *Physiother. Can.* **28**, 163.
Weed, L. (1968). Medical records that guide and teach.

New Eng. Jnl. Med. **278**, 593.
Weed, L. (1971). Quality control and the medical record. *Arch. Int. Med.* **127**, 101.

Acknowledgements

Dr. D. J. van Schalkwyk, Department for Biostatistics, South African Medical Research Council.

PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

PAUL SULCAS, B.Com., B.A. (Hons.), M.Com., D.Com., C.A.(S.A.), A.C.I.S., A.T.D.P.M.*

This article is based on a presentation by the author at the Annual General Meeting of the Private Practitioners Association of the South African Society of Physiotherapy held in Cape Town during February 1979. Various aspects of practice management are dealt with, and suggestions/recommendations made as to possible courses of action which could overcome actual (or potential) areas of concern.

INTRODUCTION

For many years I have had dealings with physiotherapists. As to professional competence in preventative and remedial treatment there can be no doubt. However, when it comes to general administrative matters there can be no doubt that much can be improved. With this fundamental premise in mind the aspects which follow are intended to provide guidelines in two directions, viz. potential areas of improvement, and/or confirmation that (if you believe it) your practice is well managed and controlled.

ASPECTS OF CONCERN

● The waiting room reflects the image of your practice. Try to ensure that it is easily accessible and well laid out; furniture to be functionally comfortable and in good condition; the walls, curtains and carpets colourful and matching; potted plants are always eye-catching; periodicals should be of interest to patients and up-to-date; and do be punctual with your appointments!

● 'Administrative' activities are relatively easy to handle provided you do not permit a backlog to build up. Considerable attention should be given to the size, content, durability and layout of the patient record card which, in many instances, also functions as patient's account card. Ensure that all patients are charged, and at the correct rate — double check all additions and subtractions. Rules for alphabetical filing of these cards should be devised in order to facilitate easy location. The handling of payments from patients is always a potential problem area and must be closely monitored. Try to prepare your monthly accounts to patients timeously to reach the patient, if possible, as near to

OPSOMMING

Die artikel is gebaseer op 'n voordrag deur die skrywer tydens die Algemene Jaarvergadering van die Privaat Praktisynevereniging van die Suid-Afrikaanse Fisioterapie Vereniging gehou te Kaapstad gedurende Februarie 1979. Aspekte van praktyksbestuur word bespreek en voorstelle/aanbevelings word gemaak ten opsigte van aksie wat werklike (of potensieële) probleem areas kan bemeester.

month-end as possible (Sulcas, 1976). Delinquent payers can be encouraged to pay by using stickers on accounts, or through personal telephonic contact, or by writing a letter. Remember that if your inflow of cash is bad because of lack of your attention/interest, you could have problems in settling your own outstanding accounts as well as keeping the Receiver of Revenue satisfied!

● Security considerations are frequently overlooked. Here specific reference is made to keeping your records locked up in a fire-proof safe during hours when the practice is closed. In addition, equipment can be stolen relatively easily and you should have serial numbers readily available for the police. Finally, check the physical security of your premises for ease of unauthorised entry, or for potential fire hazard circumstances, e.g. your air-conditioning unit.

● The method of financing equipment acquisition can be problematic when faced with alternative proposals for purchasing, leasing, or renting. It is suggested that you seek advice from someone who not only understands the implications of these choices, but also fully understands your personal circumstances. Your accountant/auditor would normally be ideal.

● If a partnership is operational, or contemplated, ensure that a legally drafted agreement exists setting out the rights and obligations of all parties. Included should be, inter alia, procedures on dissolution or admission of a new partner, and on what happens if one partner dies. Despite the friendship of partners, surprising things can (and do!) take place when problems involving money affairs arise.

● With the bulk of your patients being direct referrals from medical practitioners, it should be a standard procedure to report back — this can be done telephonically, but it is recommended that a well written report should be submitted. Not only is a permanent record made for the doctor's files, but the professionalism of your attitude cannot fail to create a good impression. Marketing professionals would call this a sound marketing strategy!

● Your personal financial affairs should not be neglected, particularly when looking to the future. Here

* Associate Professor, Department of Accounting, University of Cape Town.

Received 12 February 1980.

again your accountant/auditor should be consulted for advice on taxation, estate planning, investment possibilities, etc.

● The area of insurance coverage requires specialist expertise. Find a reliable and personally recommended broker to handle your whole insurance portfolio including an office renter's policy for all contents and public liability, personal accident/sickness in the event of misfortune, permanent disability, and professional indemnity cover. Other insurance such as life, retirement annuities, personal all-risks and similar would also be handled by this broker. Consolidation of your insurances in this manner has many advantages.

● Technological progression in equipment, coupled with an ever-expanding body of knowledge in methods of treatment, are of direct relevance to you. Keeping 'up-to-date' is incumbent on every professional and you are no exception! Subscribe to, and read, local and overseas journals; buy well reviewed books; attend formal group discussions and general meetings of your local or national association; get on the mailing list of equipment suppliers in order to receive brochures of new releases; etc. Taken together, all could be of tremendous assistance in your development.

● The potential help which your accountant/auditor can offer has already been broached in text above. It is terribly important for you to have full confidence in this individual and, if your present choice is not proving

adequate, do not hesitate to move your business elsewhere — the prerogative is yours in that you are paying for a service.

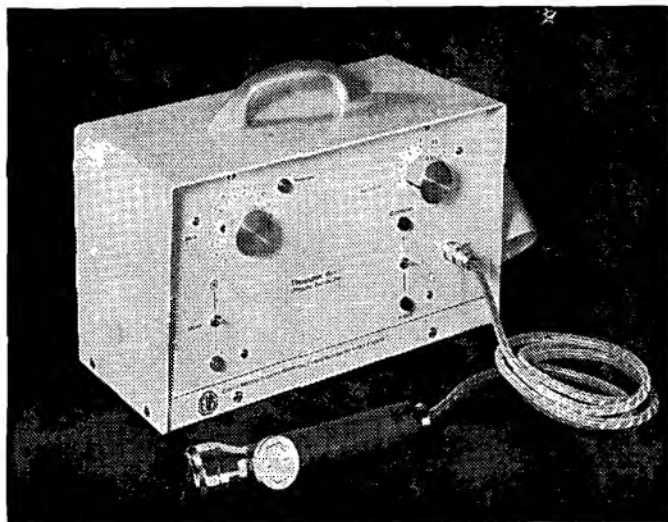
CONCLUSION

The aspects covered above are not intended to serve as a comprehensive checklist over all your practice activities. Purposely omitted is any reference to incorporation as this has been carefully investigated and evaluated by your national association — a thorough and impressive document has been prepared on this subject and widely debated throughout South Africa. In addition, preparation of annual financial statements was not even mentioned as this would be the full responsibility of an 'outsider'. However, it is submitted that the points above are fundamental to your practice activities, and they are equally relevant to the 'one-man' show as to a large partnership/association.

In the ultimate analysis, what is required is personal discipline to ensure all these aspects are under control and if found inadequate, that something constructive be done for improvement. This is what practice management is all about.

Reference

Sulcas, P. (1976): A manual system for patients' accounting records *S.A. Med. J.* 53, 859 - 862.



THE EMS THERASONIC

a truly portable Ultrasonic Unit

Weight: only 5,7 kg.

Size: 30,5 x 17,8 x 19,0 cm.

Output: Up to 3 watts per sq./cm.

Continuous as well as pulsating
output

Price R999,50 plus G.S.T.

For further details contact the Sole S.A. Agents and Distributors

MEDICAL DISTRIBUTORS PTY LTD
EDMS BPK

'CAPE YORK' | 252 JEPPE ST. | JOHANNESBURG | De Waal House, 172 Victoria Road | Woodstock, C.P.

PLEASE ADDRESS ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO P.O. BOX
RIG ASSEBLIEF ALLE KORRESPONDENSIE AAN POSBUS | 3378 JOHANNESBURG 2000

TEL. ADD. 'DISMED' | PHONE | FOON 23-8106 | TELEX: 43-7129 S.A.

