

THE VISION OF OUR SCHOLARSHIP: A CHALLENGE FOR SOUTH AFRICAN PHYSIOTHERAPY EDUCATORS

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The year 2004 will mark an important milestone for the physiotherapy profession in South Africa. As the country enters into the second decade of democracy, the South African Society of Physiotherapy will be celebrating 80 years of existence including 20 years of running a professional peer reviewed journal. It thus becomes time to reflect on the effect and implications of these developments on progress within the different aspects of the profession. The focus of this reflection is physiotherapy education in South Africa, with specific reference to the educator as a research scholar.

The Higher Education landscape in South Africa has undergone change in a variety of areas. Restructuring of higher education "is about a higher education system that will contribute to the advancement of all forms of knowledge and **scholarship**, and in particular address the diverse problems and demands of the local, national and Southern African and African contexts, and uphold rigorous standards of **academic quality**" (National Research Foundation 2004). The challenge facing higher education in South Africa is to produce the person power that will enable South Africa to engage proactively in a competitive global economy and to build a critical mass of researchers and educators. *How can the physiotherapy profession be evaluated in this regard?*

Scholarship as applied to academic life is generally understood to mean the creation of new knowledge and its dissemination through peer review and publication. Academic scholarship is based on the foundational functions of universities, which include research, teaching and service. In his seminal work "Scholarship reconsidered", Boyle (1990) defines four distinct but interrelated forms of scholarship namely Discovery (Research), Teaching, Application (Service) and Integration.

To investigate research scholarship in physiotherapy, I conducted a content analysis of our professional journal as previously described (Mothabeng 2003). Preliminary findings on the first objective indicate that the demographics of our publications still reflect the sad reality of our unfortunate past. Article authorship is still dominated by females, the majority being white, with very few black South African authors. An interesting finding is most of the black-authored articles were

based on survey type research; with their papers asking about needs, perceptions, views, needs and experiences of subjects.

A significant implication of this observed publication pattern is what appears to be preferences in styles of publication and research method. Deeper analysis of this apparent preference suggests that indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) might have a role to play here. This is a topic on its own and will therefore be discussed in detail in a future publication.

The challenge to the profession is to facilitate the development of the scholarly profile of their educators. These are the people through whose hands our graduates pass and we, as a profession need to find ways of ensuring that quality 'scholarly educators' are in place. This should be a professional concern, not only an institutional issue. How are we as a profession going to drive the scholarship agenda forward to make sure that our educators, especially the previously disadvantaged ones are scholars in research, teaching and practice?

One simple way forward is to forge local strategic networks, by reviving the old Lecturer's forum of the South African Society of Physiotherapy. Through such a body, the educators can exchange ideas and help each other develop as scholars. International and inter-professional networks will obviously add value to the agenda.

Joyce Mothabeng (University Of Pretoria)

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