Advancing evidence based musculoskeletal physical therapy

Evidence-based practice is defined as the “integration of the best research evidence with clinical expertise and patient values” (Sackett et al., 2000, p1). Central to this definition are both the development of an evidence base and the use of that evidence in practice to inform decision-making.

It is widely acknowledged that the evidence base of physical therapy is improving, with for example, increasing numbers of trials and systematic reviews detailed within the Physiotherapy Evidence Database PEDro. However, studies suggest that a delay exists for implementing evidence in practice (Grimshaw and Eccles, 2004) and that clinical practice does not fully reflect this evidence base. Many issues contribute to this evidence-practice gap, including access to evidence and problems in evaluating the evidence (Maher et al., 2004), as well as organisational, educational and health policy issues (Haynes and Haines, 1998).

The current international economic difficulty contributes further to the many challenges to research and clinical practice in musculoskeletal physical therapy. It is therefore important to recognise our pioneers, who themselves have faced many challenges throughout their careers, and yet have advanced musculoskeletal practice both through research to provide evidence, and through facilitating its implementation into practice over several decades.

The following descriptions of contributions from three such pioneers remind us of their importance:

“… a driving force in the physical therapy profession across the world. From New Zealand, where he earned his physical therapist entry-level qualification and first awards in the 1950s, to the United States of America where he lives and works today” (reference to Stanley Paris)

“… has given sustained and continuous leadership in neuro-musculoskeletal physical therapy over almost four decades” (reference to Gwen Jull)

“… her tireless drive to develop the profession has undoubtedly played a key role in the considerable worldwide development of the profession, particularly in the field of musculoskeletal physical therapy” (reference to Ann Moore)

It was therefore wonderful to attend the awards dinner of the World Confederation of Physical Therapy (WCPT) Congress in Amsterdam in June 2011, and see three pioneers of musculoskeletal physical therapy presented with major awards for their contributions to the profession internationally.

Stanley Paris (President of the University of St Augustine for Health Sciences, USA) received the WCPT’s highest honour, the Mildred Elson Award (Mildred Elson was the founding President of WCPT), for sustained and continuous leadership over his career and for a significant contribution to the development of physical therapy at an international level. Stanley was recognised as having influenced and furthered the profession through his writing, teaching, clinical practice, and advocacy. He was described as an inspiration to many, and as an outstanding role model and leader. Stanley played a founding and influential role in three musculoskeletal organisations as: founding chairman and second president of the International Federation of Orthopaedic Manipulative Physical Therapists (IFOMPT), founder and President of the Orthopaedic Section of the American Physical Therapy Association and the American Academy of Orthopaedic Manual Physical Therapists. Stanley also founded the Journal of Manual and Manipulative Therapy. I can also add that Stanley continues to contribute his wisdom and experience to the workings of IFOMPT on a regular basis.

Both Gwen Jull and Ann Moore received the WCPT’s International Service Award. These awards are to honour individuals who have made a great contribution towards physical therapy internationally or within their region, and can be awarded for practice, research, education, or administration and policy development. We know Gwen and Ann well as co-editors of this journal, as collectively they have ensured that Manual Therapy has become well established in a competitive multidisciplinary field. The impact factor of the journal, and its ranking in the ISI’s category of Rehabilitation Journals is evidence of the journal’s success and its importance to physical therapists and other practitioners.

Gwen Jull (Professor of Physiotherapy, University of Queensland, Australia) received the International Service Award for her outstanding contribution to practice. She was acknowledged as one of the early active researchers within musculoskeletal physical therapy, and her work has ensured that methods used in clinical practice were robustly tested and developed through research. Gwen was also acknowledged as being instrumental in developing research capability for developing the evidence base of musculoskeletal physical therapy within the profession worldwide. Her work was described as bringing highly original and innovative concepts to clinical practice that altered practice at an international level. Gwen was recognised as working tirelessly to promote evidence based practice within the profession, providing an inspiration to physiotherapists worldwide in advancing knowledge as...
well as enhancing clinical practice through innovation. I can also add that Gwen was the previous Chair of the Standards Committee of IFOMPT, advancing international standards in orthopaedic manipulative therapy from 1988 to 2004.

Ann Moore (Professor of Physiotherapy, University of Brighton, UK) received the International Service Award for her outstanding contribution to research. She was acknowledged as being committed to high educational and research standards. It was recognised that over many years Ann has contributed to IFOMPT through sharing her vast knowledge and leadership skills, and by extending the research base for orthopaedic manipulative therapy. Ann’s extensive curriculum vitae was described as illustrating her service to the physical therapy profession internationally: as a lecturer, keynote speaker, reviewer, scientific panel member, editor, author and member of conference committees. This year, she has played a central role in organising the WCPT Congress, as Chair of its International Scientific Committee. Ann’s friendship, wisdom and encouragement were recognised as inspirational to many physical therapists internationally. I can also add that in the UK, Ann is currently Research Lead for the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, Chair of the National Physiotherapy Research Network, and Chair of National Council for Osteopathic Research.

A common thread throughout all of the citations was IFOMPT, which as an international organisation with part of its mission to ‘promote and facilitate evidence based practice and research amongst its members’ relies on pioneers such as Stanley, Gwen and Ann. In total, 16 awards were made by the WCPT in their 60th year of existence, and 4 of them were presented to musculoskeletal physical therapists. Accompanying Stanley, Gwen, and Ann as award winners was Ina Diener who also received the International Service Award. Ina is the Member Organisation delegate for South Africa within IFOMPT.

References