

The South African Journal of PHYSIOTHERAPY Die Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif FISIOTERAPIE



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EDITORIAL

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS TO THE SIXTEENTH NATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY OF PHYSIOTHERAPY HELD IN JOHANNESBURG ON 19 APRIL 1985

This week we are celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of the South African Society of Physiotherapy. As a member who has given thirty years of continuous service as an Office Bearer of the Society, it is indeed a very proud moment for me to be able to present this address to-day as your President.

The Society was founded in 1925 and at the opening of the Congress held earlier this week, we were given a brief resumé of some of the struggles and achievements of our predecessors of those early years. It is only natural therefore, that those of us who have been intimately associated with the Society for thirty years or more, should look back and assess the value of the efforts that have been made to further the cause of physiotherapy in the Republic of South Africa under the auspices of the Society.

May I pause at this point and put some questions to you all:

What does the Society mean to the profession of Physiotherapy and to the physiotherapists in this country?

Why do we need a Society?

What do you expect of your Society?

Associations and Societies have been in existence for almost as long as civilisation itself. The earliest Associations or Guilds, as they were commonly called, were those of trade and industry formed to achieve the best for their members by collective action. One of the earliest known scientific Societies, the "Academia Secretorum Naturae" was founded in Naples in 1560 and its function was to collect and disseminate scientific knowledge.

There followed a period of rapid growth of both Associations and Societies embracing diverse fields in both the trade and professional spheres. Groups of people with common goals and interests banded together in attempts to solve mutual problems. Unlike the trade Associations whose main objectives were, and still are, to stimulate economic activity, professional Societies concerned themselves mainly with education, training and promotion of the welfare and interests of their profession.

May I repeat one of my questions:

What do you expect of your Society to-day?

Thirty years ago, a major reconstruction of the South African Society of Physiotherapists took place. The name was changed to the South African Society of Physiotherapy and a new Constitution was drawn up and approved at the First National Council Meeting held in 1955. This incidentally accounts for the fact that we are to-day holding our Sixteenth National Council Meeting as these Meetings have only been held biennially, starting from that date.

The basic structure of the above Constitution provided for a National Council which was to be the governing body of the Society and to consist of the Office Bearers and the elected National Council Members. The latter were to be responsible for the election of the Office Bearers and the members of the Central Executive Committee which later became the National Executive Committee. This Committee would act on behalf of the National Council during the period between Meetings. Ten Branches were territorially delineated and were to be responsible for the control and management of their own affairs. The foundations were laid for the formation of Special Groups/Associations which are now an integral part of our Society. May I say here that there were many members totally opposed to the formation of these Special Groups on the grounds that they would splinter the whole framework and cause conflict and confrontation within our ranks.

I make so bold to state categorically that these fears have proved groundless and that the Central Administration could not function effectively without them.

If you study the "Objects" in our present Constitution which are, with the exception of a few minor changes, those that were drawn up thirty years ago and, at the same time consider Report 17.1.1 of the Agenda for this Council Meeting, you will note a marked similarity in the stated objectives of our profession. You will soon appreciate that what have been stated as the "Long Term Objectives" and "Short Term Goals" for which our Society should aim, are not necessarily new concepts, but are, in fact, mainly the on-going Objectives of our Society spelt out in depth. We must therefore appreciate that in order to establish a sound operational and professional Society our Objectives must be viable and implementable. In a Society such as ours which leans heavily on voluntary helpers, it is essential to increase and maintain the membership to ensure an adequate financial position in order to make use of skilled management services as the scope of the work load increases.

The theme of the Congress was "Facets of Physiotherapy" and among those covered by the papers were Education, Research, Clinical Practice, Administration, Counselling and Consultancy. These facets are not to be viewed singly. No education or training is complete without Research or Continuing Education and being essentially a practical profession we are given the opportunity during our clinical patient care to counsel and consult.

There are now eight Training Centres for the education of physiotherapy students. Each centre is attached to a University and offers a basic four year Physiotherapy Degree. Higher post-graduate degrees as well as some post-registration diplomas which qualify for additional registration with the Professional Board for Physiotherapy are offered. There are also many opportunities for attending courses for continuing education.

But what of the future?

We were honoured to have the Minister of Health and Welfare, Dr. C. V. van der Merwe, open our Congress. In his address, Dr. van der Merwe referred to the expanding role of all the medical services in the Republic and in particular that of the Supplementary Health Services Professions which include physiotherapy. But, where does the physiotherapist of today fit into the Health Services of tomorrow?

What are the needs of the Health Services for the future of South Africa now being planned and implemented? And, where does the physiotherapist of today fit into these plans?

We are a practical profession, but is our training programme really catering for those thousands, no, tens of thousands of peoples in this country who should benefit from our services?

At present we have a one year in-service training for physiotherapy assistants, registrable with the South African Medical and Dental Council. These assistants have an extremely limited basic instruction which in no way equips them for the more extensive clinical practice that may be required of them. No avenues should be left unexplored in the consideration of the introduction of a possible second level of training. This must have a clinical bias with a view to the extension of physiotherapy services in the urban and rural communities.

Let us return to the Facets of that magnificent Diamond Jubilee logo of the Congress. It is foreseeable that the future of professional physiotherapy must change from the more conventional clinical work to that of specialisation and more advanced educational and research programmes. There will be a greater awareness of the principles of sound administration and an increasing role of the physiotherapist as both counsellor and consultant. With the extension of the clinical work being done by physiotherapy assistants, the status of the degreed physiotherapist must surely alter. There must be an added responsibility in supervisory and advisory roles with the advancement of the training programmes.

An increased medical and legal recognition by the South African Medical and Dental Council through the Professional Board for Physiotherapy must become an important goal to be rigorously sought by our Society.

Madam Chairman and members of Council,
Sixty years of our Society have come and gone.
What of the next sixty years?

Let us salute the achievements of the past and greet the challenge of the future with a determination never before equalled in our history.

The time has come for this Society and profession to emerge from the past and ensure that physiotherapists are not found only in the hospital departments and private treatment rooms of the cities and towns, but that they are an integral part of the community services in those areas where physiotherapy has not yet come into its own.

Let us make quite sure that we all know the answer to this question;

WHITHER PHYSIOTHERAPY?

or Physiotherapy shall surely **WITHER.**

K. M. LEVY

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