
ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to determine trends in the types and first authorship of articles that appeared in the South African Journal of Physiotherapy for the decade, 1985-1994. All 140 articles in the 40 issues of the South African Journal of Physiotherapy for the decade were classified as either research or non-research articles. Research articles using qualitative methodologies were distinguished from those with quantitative ones. First authors of the articles were classified as either physiotherapy academics, physiotherapy students, clinicians or non-physiotherapists. The results show no significant difference in the number of research vs. non-research articles published for the decade. More non-research articles were published in the first five year period while research articles predominated in the second five year period. Quantitative studies using the experimental method appeared significantly more often in the first five years compared to the second five year period. The majority of the papers were first authored by physiotherapists especially academics. Methodologies and first authorship of papers published in the South African Journal of Physiotherapy revealed an interesting trend, thereby providing clues to growth points and deficits within the profession.

Introduction

The South African Journal of Physiotherapy is a forum for South African physiotherapists to share their research findings, advances in clinical practice and education, new techniques and approaches with their colleagues. The Journal therefore should reflect the standard of physiotherapy education, research and practice, in this country. Concern has been expressed by members of the profession about contributions made to the Journal by physiotherapists1 and that the contents of the Journal does not really reflect the standards of physiotherapy in South Africa. However, since the Journal is the only form of communication between the profession and the outside world, it is imperative that a critical review of publication trends within the Journal forms one starting point of assessing the growth of the profession.

Since the growth of any profession depends on the ability of the profession to validate clinical practice and educational methods through objective scientific research, the contents of the Journal should provide valuable clues about the direction in which the profession is moving. Previous research by Mitchell2,3 suggests that the majority (69% - 75%) of the papers published between 1984-1988, and 1980-1989 were descriptive in nature. Mitchell2 classified an article as descriptive if it was principally a description of a technique, case study or basic principles. Since a case study is a form of qualitative research method, Mitchell’s2,3 findings do not really provide any information about the types of articles i.e. qualitative4,5 (survey, case study etc.) vs. quantitative5 (experimental, clinical) vs. non-research articles appearing in the South African Journal of Physiotherapy.

Mitchell’s studies also categorised the authors of the articles in the South African Journal of Physiotherapy. It is clear in her studies that the majority of the articles in the South African Journal of Physiotherapy for the decade 1980-1989 were authored by physiotherapy academicians. However, it is not known whether this trend continued beyond 1989.

The primary purpose of the present study was to critically categorise the articles appearing in the South African Journal of Physiotherapy in terms of qualitative, quantitative and non-research articles in order to determine trends in publication of the decade 1985-1994. Secondly to determine who the first authors of the publications were in order to determine whether publication in the Journal is supported and sustained by members of the profession.

Materials and Methods

Sample

The sample consisted of all articles (n = 140) appearing in the South African Journal of Physiotherapy for the decade 1985-1994. All reports of special interest groups or meetings were excluded from the analysis.

Methods

Articles were classified initially as research or non-research. Research articles were those articles that used some kind of research methodology, qualitative or quantitative4,5. Non-research articles were those articles that gave a description of a technique, approach, or gave more information about a subject, including review papers. Research articles were further classified as qualitative (survey or case study) or quantitative (experimental or
First authors of papers were categorised as academicians, clinicians, physiotherapy students, and others (those who were not physiotherapists). Only first authors were included in the analysis because presumably this author motivated the publication in the first instance.

Data Analysis

The data about type of article and first author were tabulated for each year and means calculated for each five year period, (1985-1989) and (1990-1994) for the decade 1985-1994. Means were used to determine whether any differences in publication trends or first authorship existed between the earlier and later five year periods compared to the ten year period. Independent two tailed T-tests were used to determine significant differences between the numbers of research and non-research articles, qualitative vs. quantitative research and first author physiotherapy academicians vs. first author non-physiotherapists. Probability was set at 0.05.

Results

As shown in Table I a total of 140 articles were published in the 40 issues of the South African Journal of Physiotherapy for the decade 1985-1994. Numbers of research vs. non-research articles fluctuated per year. Over the 10 year period, 1985-1994, the numbers of research articles published was not significantly different from that of non-research articles. However, for the first five year period (1985-1989), a significantly greater number of non-research articles appeared in the Journal. This trend was reversed in the second five year period when significantly more research articles were published compared to that of non-research papers.

A breakdown of research articles into qualitative and quantitative methodologies as demonstrated in Table II shows that for the decade under study, the number of papers with quantitative methodologies was not significantly different from those papers which utilised qualitative methodologies. However, in the first five year period (1985-1989) significantly more quantitative papers were published compared to qualitative papers. The majority of qualitative papers were experimental in nature. In the second five year period (1990-1994) equal numbers of qualitative and quantitative papers were published in the Journal. The majority of the qualitative papers utilised the survey method to collect data while the experimental methodology dominated the quantitative papers.

Table III shows that the majority of the papers published per year for the decade 1985-1994 were authored either by physiotherapy academicians or non-physiotherapists. However, for the entire decade and the second five year period, a significantly greater number of papers were authored by physiotherapy academicians compared to any other category of author. The first five year period saw an equal number of papers authored by physio-
therapy academicians and non-physiotherapists. A collapse of author categories into physiotherapists compared with non-physiotherapy authors showed significantly more papers authored by members of the host profession.

Discussion

The number of articles published over each five year period and the decade compares favourably with that of other physiotherapy periodicals in the rest of the world.

Publications in the South African Journal of Physiotherapy showed a tendency to include more research articles compared to non-research articles in the second five year period under study. This trend is a clear indication of an evolving and growing profession. Robertson found a similar trend in the American Journal of Physical Therapy, but the evolution in Physical Therapy occurred many decades earlier. Although quantitative methodologies predominated in the first five year period, qualitative papers appeared more frequently in the second five year period. The majority of the papers were authored by physiotherapists with physiotherapy academicians carrying the larger load.

The results of this study cannot be directly compared to those published by Mitchell because her categorisation of articles was different from the present study. These findings add to Mitchell's results which reveals some very important aspects of the publications. This study showed that physiotherapists with physiotherapy academicians carrying the larger load. The number of articles published over each five year period and the decade compares favourably with that of other physiotherapy periodicals in the rest of the world.

Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm a trend in type and authorship of articles that appear in the South African Journal of Physiotherapy for the decade 1985-1994. These findings can be used as a starting point to address the scientific growth of the profession. The period under review is the period when almost all training centres in this country had replaced the diploma in physiotherapy with a Bachelors degree. One of the prerequisites for graduation is a research project. Is the profession reaping the benefits of an improved curriculum in the Bachelors degree programme? As in the United States, a growth in quality graduate programmes with strong research emphasis is likely to be reflected in the publication trends in the South African Journal of Physiotherapy. Further research is needed, to look into the effects of strategies implemented by the profession and education centres on trends in the Journal of Physiotherapy.

References

Guidelines For Authors

The Type of Article

Contributions to the *South African Journal of Physiotherapy* are invited on any topic related to physiotherapy or rehabilitation.

A full-length article may be

- a report on research
- a description of an approach
- a literature review
- a presentation of a theory.

A short report may be

- a case report
- a clinical report
- a treatment technique or suggestion.

Legal Considerations

Contributions will be considered for publication in the *South African Journal of Physiotherapy* on condition that

- they have not been published previously.
- they have not been submitted for publication elsewhere.
- the Publications Division of the SASP reserves the copyright of all material published.

Acceptance

Articles are accepted on the understanding that they are subject to editorial revision.

Presentation

Articles

- articles should be restricted to between 2,000 and 2,500 words.
- the three copies submitted should be typewritten with double spacing and wide margins.
- word processors may be used provided the typeface is clear and legible.
- a title page should be supplied as a separate sheet and include the name(s), qualifications and affiliation(s) of the author(s), together with addresses and telephone numbers (at home and at work).
- each article must be accompanied by a summary of not more than 200 words. This should be on a separate sheet. It should be intelligible without reference to the main text.
- key words which sum up the content of the article which are not a duplication of the title may be included. Three words are sufficient for referencing and indexing.
- all abbreviations should be spelt out when first used.
- the metric system is to be used throughout.

Letters to the editor

- if a letter is intended for the correspondence column it should be marked "for publication".
- it should not be longer than 400 words.

References

- all references should be typed on a separate sheet.
- references should be cited in sequential order. *Do not list them alphabetically.*
- they are identified in the text by superscript arabic numbers.
- references should be set out in the Vancouver style and only approved abbreviations of journal titles should be used.
- it is the author's responsibility to verify references from the original sources.
- "Unpublished observations" and "personal communications" may be cited in the text, but not in the reference list.
- manuscripts accepted but not yet published may be cited, followed by "(in press)".

The format for references is as follows:

Journals: Not more than three authors


Books:


Illustrations

- tables and figures should be kept to a minimum and be on separate sheets.
- each table should be numbered and have a clear title. Tables should not repeat material stated in the text. All tables and figures must be referenced in the text in sequential order.
- figures should be in black ink on stiff white paper. The lettering should be done professionally or by means of a stencil to allow for reduction in size.
- photocopies are not acceptable.
- graphics printed on dot-matrix printers are not acceptable.
- photographs should be of good quality on glossy paper. Human subjects must not be identifiable or their pictures must be accompanied by written permission to use the photograph.
- all illustrations should be clearly marked on the reverse side with arabic numerals, author's name and article, and an indication of the top side.
- all legends must be typed on a separate sheet.
- if a figure has been published before, the author must reproduce the material.

Manuscript submission

- a covering letter, which must include the signature of each co-author, should accompany each manuscript.
- the original copy of the paper as well as two copies, must be submitted. A further copy of the manuscript should be retained by the author.
- a word-processing file, in WordPerfect 5.1, on a floppy may be included.
- permission to reprint figures or extracts from other publications should be included with the manuscript on submission.