PHYSIOTHERAPY IN HOMES FOR THE ELDERLY†

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It has been said that 'the important thing is to add life to years and not years to life'.

The authors set out to investigate the views on physiotherapy in Homes for the Elderly and to find out the actual role of the physiotherapist in these Homes.

Twenty-two Homes were chosen at random in and around Cape Town. Of these only ten employed physiotherapists. Five Homes were for Coloureds and the other 17 for Whites. The interviews conducted with the matrons and physiotherapists of the Homes were based on a questionnaire/checklist. The average percentage of male residents was 17% compared to 83% females. The average age group of the residents was 78 years, the range being between 55 and 100 years of age.

When asked if they saw physiotherapy as a necessary service in the Home, two of the 12 matrons interviewed said 'no', as the residents were healthy and independent, yet they, together with seven of the other matrons, defined physiotherapy as rehabilitation, exercises and motivation.

All the members felt that it would be useful to be advised by a physiotherapist on specific details such as suitability of footwear for the residents, the proper use of walking aids and simple chest treatments. With regard to patient handling, most matrons felt that a physiotherapist was better qualified than the nursing sister to train the nursing staff.

In the ten Homes who employed physiotherapists, only one physiotherapist worked full-time. Six of the physiotherapists were of the opinion that they could cope with their work load, as the residents were either healthy and independent or senile, in which case they would not understand instructions. One physiotherapist at a Home with 300 residents, however, said she was only 'scratching the surface'; another replied that she had only had time to treat the chronic cases.

Only four of the ten physiotherapists had previous postgraduate experience with the elderly. The others had received

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PHYSIOTHERAPY IN GERIATRICS IN THE TRANSVAAL

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Physiotherapy was not considered an integral part of Geriatric Care in South Africa until the end of 1958 when a team of volunteers initiated a rehabilitative programme at one of the homes in Johannesburg.

By the beginning of the following year an attempt had been made to promote preventative physiotherapy amongst active elderly residents and classes were given twice weekly in the evenings. This proved to be very successful and soon a

paid, part-time physiotherapist was appointed at the home to carry out curative treatment while the volunteers continued with their evening sessions.

In 1961 the team was approached by the Rand Aid Association to extend their services to other homes in Johannesburg and with the backing of the S.A. Society of Physiotherapy, three further homes were included in the programme.

The value of the work done by these early pioneers in this field was gradually recognised and by the end of 1964 several homes had appointed part-time physiotherapists to their staff.

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Disciplinary symposium was organised to discuss the role of the Aged held in Port Elizabeth in 1965, the first multi-disciplinary approach. Mr A. Rothberg, who represented the S.A.S.P., discussed the importance of physiotherapy and the part it played in the general team approach.

This symposium stirred the interest of Natal and the Western Cape and gradually their services for the elderly overtook those of the Transvaal. Physiotherapy students from the Cape and Pretoria were also encouraged to run fitness classes for residents in their areas. Although the need for open-air sports and recreation clubs for senior citizens was realised, no able-bodied sports club could be persuaded to allow the elderly non-members to use their facilities. However, in 1972 the Mandeville Sport and Social Centre opened its doors and in co-operation with the Johannesburg Council for the Care of the Aged and Rotary Johannesburg South, the Mandeville Senior Citizens Club was developed.

The sport and recreation club under the guidance of Mr Rothberg has proved most successful with its outdoor games and indoor recreational activities, which include fitness classes. It has also been the prototype for others in Johannesburg, Edenvale, Benoni, Krugersdorp, Springs and Soweto.

In 1974 the S.A. Society of Physiotherapy was asked by the Witwatersrand Technikon to draw up a lecture course on physiotherapy in the care of the aged. This is one of the subjects offered for the National Certificate of Institutional Care for aides in Homes for the Aged. Mr Rothberg compiled the syllabus and has been an examiner in this subject until the present time.

It was realised that undergraduate students should be made aware of the need to treat geriatric patients in the community and in 1978 the students of the University of Witwatersrand were given this experience. Three homes close to the Medical School which had never had the services of physiotherapists, were chosen. At these homes the handling of residents generally promoted a dependent attitude.

By 1981 most of the teething problems experienced at these homes had been sorted out and the staff are most enthusiastic about physiotherapy. They have come to realise the importance of fitness classes and correct handling of patients in the overall programme of residents.

During the same period three service centres were visited and weekly fitness classes were offered to the members. Three new centres were opened in 1982 and the need for physiotherapy has been given high priority.

The Municipal Senior Citizens' recreation clubs in Johannesburg are looking for helpers to arrange fitness classes in Jabula, Braamfontein and Yeoville. Social workers at Senior Citizens' Clubs in Soweto have already instituted classes in various areas.

The demand for physiotherapy in the Care of the Aged is increasing and means for catering for this need will have to be found. Physiotherapists throughout the Republic are being invited to investigate what the needs in their own areas are and to suggest how these may be met. Relatively few homes have a regular physiotherapist in attendance while the need in rural areas, away from the larger centres, is known to be even more acute.

REPORT ON THE 11th MEETING OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE OF REPRESENTATIVES HELD ON 16 OCTOBER 1982 IN JOHANNESBURG

As there were several new representatives, each representative introduced him/herself and whom represented. Apologies were noted and voting strength established. After 7.1.1 (Action Committee) was amended by removal, the minutes of the previous meeting were accepted.

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The evaluation of the profession by the office of the Commission for Administration followed after many years of negotiation: in 1976 a delegation presented a memorandum to the newly constituted Health Matters Advisory Committee and in 1980 the career and salary structure of supplementary health personnel was “uncoupled from that of nurses”. Presently careers and salaries are being restructured on the principle of professional differentiation (beroeps differensiasie). The pharmacists were the first profession to be evaluated and had their new structure implemented in January 1982, whilst that for nurses is being implemented as of October 1983. A further eight disciplines are to have new structures implemented within the present financial year. No doubt further self-evaluation will follow once the outcome of the state-commissioned evaluation is known. Professional assessment, researched among colleagues and consumers, is a continuing process in all the English-speaking physiotherapy societies, being indicative of professional growth and development. The position of physiotherapists in special schools and the Defence Force will also be clarified once the report is accepted and implemented. Physiotherapists joining the Permanent Force now have the opportunity for advancement in recognition of leadership qualities. The need for physiotherapy in psychiatric hospitals has been highlighted and undergraduate courses are being evaluated in this regard. Active steps need to be taken to equip and recruit physiotherapists for this field. The training of departmental physiotherapy assistants is now a reality and to assist trainers at approved institutions, teaching material will be collected and collated in order to produce a standardized handout. The International Year of the Aged has increased awareness of the need of geriatrics and actively involved many people. Miss J. Mohr will hold a post-registration