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EDITORIAL

FULL PROFESSIONAL STATUS

After a long struggle by the S.A.S.P. a change has been made to rule 21 of our ethical code of conduct. This states that disciplinary steps may be taken by the Professional Board for Physiotherapy if any patient is treated "except in an emergency —

- a) where such patient has not been referred by a registered medical practitioner or a registered dentist; or
- b) *where such treatment, in the case of a patient not so referred, is given otherwise than in close collaboration with a registered medical practitioner or a registered dentist:*

Provided that the expression "in close collaboration" in this subrule shall mean that the physiotherapist at one or another stage of the physiotherapy treatment, though not necessarily before undertaking such treatment, consults a registered medical practitioner or a registered dentist on the case concerned and at the end of such treatment furnishes him with a report on such treatment."¹

This is a most important step in our struggle for true professional status. Only a person who has full control over the work he or she does can be regarded as a professional. Where the patients are selected and/or the modalities of treatment are chosen by someone belonging to another discipline, the therapist cannot be regarded as a true professional. One must be able to select and treat according to the needs of the patient.

Certainly *collaboration* is essential. We are not trained to diagnose, although a careful assessment often adds to the diagnosis of the doctor. But a competent physiotherapist should be able to decide whether or not to treat as well as how to treat.

With the promulgation of this new rule, Physiotherapy has gained its independence in South Africa. But with independence comes responsibility. This is **not** a licence to treat every patient who comes asking for treatment. Nor is it a licence to use several modalities where one would

suffice. If the physiotherapist ceases to treat only on referral, she must now bear the full responsibility of her actions. The medical practitioner no longer has to shoulder this burden.

So what this new rule means is that the standard of the service rendered must be higher than ever. No patient should be treated without a detailed assessment. The modalities of treatment chosen must be very specific and the progress of the patient must be closely monitored. If the patient will not benefit from physiotherapy, he must not be treated.

You now have a licence to practise, but you may practise only under licence. This is your professional status. Guard it well.

L. M. Davids.

1. Government Gazette, 9 August 1985. No. R. 1731.

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