

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

This volume of the South African Journal of Communication Disorders begins with a lead article written by the Journal's editorial board. Several notable researcher-practitioners were invited to write their responses to this article. These five authors have provided their views and opinions on the relevance of professional research to the lives of the people with whom we work.

Prof Sally Hartley, a UK based Speech-Language Therapist (SLT) has worked in economically developed and economically developing countries, mainly in Africa. She has a deep interest in the development of SLT and Audiology across geographical contexts. In presenting her interactionist perspective of research and practice, she does so with the reminder that the topic is important to consider across social and economic geographies. Indeed, her review is relevant not only for SLT and Audiology but for rehabilitation practice in itself. Echoing similar sentiments, *Prof Erna Alant* (Centre for Alternative and Augmentative Communication, Pretoria) has drawn on her long-standing involvement in addressing social and economic concerns within rehabilitation practice. She has poignantly challenged the profession with the following question:

When is our commitment to our profession more overtly going to focus on government support and liaisons to develop service and intervention models that could work for rehabilitation in our country? (Page 12)

Similarly, *Prof Claire Penn* (University of the Witwatersrand) asks us to consider several points in her rather challenging review. Via her perspective, not only as an A-rated scientist but also as recipient of President Mbeki's Order of the Mapungubwe Award (silver); Penn has provided an astute, rich analysis of the wide range of research methodologies available to practitioners. However, as we foray into non-mainstream methodologies, Penn cautions us about diminishing scientific rigour. Of the many challenges that she poses, I, on behalf of the Journal, echo Penn when she asks:

Why do people think that research is only for those who are not clinically inclined?

Penn's challenges and cautions are to be considered especially in relation to ideologies such as Singh's reference to distributive justice. *Prof Shajila Singh*, the chairperson of the profession's board on the Health Professions Council of SA, invites us to consider questions such as the racial and cultural profile of our researchers, their research interests and – importantly – of researchers' foci not just on communities in SA that tend to be over-researched but of how we engage these communities in deciding research methodologies and the research process itself.

In arguing that professional research should transcend political agendas, *Dr. De Wet Swanepoel* (University of Pretoria) has positioned his perspective on the ideology that our professions need to transcend political ideology

toward respecting aspects of human dignity and respect for all persons. Swanepoel adds a very pragmatic slant to the research activity and agenda within the profession. In lamenting the low publication rate, he argues that "...whatever the research being pursued, it must ultimately be published." (page 11). The editorial board of this Journal could not agree more with this statement. Indeed, the decision to write this lead article is part of the Journal's strategy to highlight the nature of research, especially of relevant research, within the professions of Speech-Language Therapy and Audiology. It is our attempt not only to stimulate interest but to encourage our readership into actively engaging the thoughts, challenges and recommendations published in the Journal. The articles contained within this volume of the Journal may be in sync with your notion of relevance in research/practice. Alternatively, you may disagree with the relevance of authors' orientation, theoretical stance or methodology. As SLT and Audiology practitioners, we may very well choose to make these issues of relevance invisible. Alternatively, we may choose to raise the visibility of relevance in our professional research and practice toward dizzying heights. While ambitious, we think the latter is an honourable and necessary aim well worth confronting.

Mershen Pillay

Editor-in-Chief

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