

A TRIBUTE TO MOLLY LEVY

LOIS DYER, HONORARY LIFE VICE PRESIDENT, SASP

It is nearly fifty years ago that I first met Molly Levy. I had just left England as a traditionally educated physiotherapist to work in Johannesburg. From the moment I arrived, Molly and Jimmy, her wonderfully supportive husband, did everything possible to make me welcome. They continued to help me in many ways over the years and we maintained a solid friendship.

I was surprised and delighted to discover that Molly was among those who had pioneered and developed a four-year degree course at the Witwatersrand University, for physiotherapy students, studying in close contact with medical students. She worked in direct collaboration with Professor Jean Blair, who, until her death, was an Honorary Life Vice-President of the South African Society.

Clinicians were intimately involved in teaching students and as I was appointed in charge of the clinical physiotherapy services, at the Johannesburg General Hospital (later Hillbrow Hospital), I was privileged to co-operate with the academic staff in the rewarding sphere of student education. The very positive outcome of skilled and well educated graduates was in no small way attributable to Molly Levy's vision and dedication.

Molly quickly involved me in the affairs of the South African Society of Physiotherapy with which I have been proudly and happily associated ever since and remain a supportive and enthusiastic Honorary Life Vice-President. The contributions Molly made in so many ways to the profession as a whole and the Society in particular, are indelible milestones in their intertwined history.

Her death has made me reflect on her achievements. Through many difficult times Molly negotiated superbly with dignity and common sense at national and international level. She was determined to establish and maintain acceptable standards of practice and respect for the profession. Her efforts were rewarded during her lifetime as the Society and its individual members are everywhere held in high esteem.

If she were here to work for physiotherapy for the next 50 years, what would be her objectives? She would undoubtedly recognise that the first battle has been won in that the profession is now an integral and essential part of the South African health services. Now it is time to accelerate changes, the most important are, to ensure that physiotherapy practices are based on clinical research, to ensure effectiveness, to provide a major input at primary care level and to recognise the importance of human contact and empathy in a highly technical world of health care. Our practice needs to spread outside the confines of hospital walls. Most people who can benefit from our skills do not live permanently in hospital. This is particularly relevant to the challenges in South Africa with its huge unmet needs.

Teaching and sharing of skills with others, be they family and carers or other professionals is another essential aspect of practice which is sometimes only grudgingly accepted. Much lip service is paid to the phrase "multi-disciplinary" but far too often it is not a reality. An unacceptable amount of time is mis-spent by highly and expensively educated physiotherapists undertaking tasks which could more appropriately be delegated to others. Changing this would release time for physiotherapists to enhance their skills as educators, teachers, researchers and managers which is so vital in a rapidly changing world. The greatest tribute the profession could make to her would be to follow her example of determination and integrity and demonstrate the willingness to participate in the hard work involved in effecting change. No progress can be made without change but what Molly Levy would have wished is that the changes are well thought through and always contributing towards making physiotherapy more accessible, affordable and acceptable in order to ensure that physiotherapy is relevant to all those who could most benefit in South Africa.

The hard work and resultant achievements of this remarkable and loved friend and colleague stand as a memorial to her, forming a solid base on which to build.

We need to honour and revere great physiotherapists, of which Molly Levy is one.

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