

# LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Those of us privileged to attend and contribute to the tremendously exciting 12th International Congress of the World Confederation for Physical Therapy "Dimensions of Excellence" discovered first hand that the New South Africa is indeed re-integrated in the world body again.

What was unmistakable is that we all share the same challenges – diminishing resources, too few therapists and an ever increasing challenge to work together to devise means both of meeting the growing needs especially of the previously underserved members of the population and of promoting our profession pro-actively. Furthermore, all of the countries who most need to develop innovative approaches, are all losing members of the profession to the countries who can afford to offer them more money and better service conditions.

I have three reasons for writing this letter.

First, I would like to offer a vote of thanks to our WCPT representatives, Sheena Irwin-Carruthers (and Molly Levy before her) who managed to motivate our continuous inclusion in the WCPT through the years, in spite of the fact that many countries wanted us excluded. Much work went into maintaining membership and they and the other physiotherapists who managed this feat deserve our congratulations and thanks.

Secondly, I would like to propose an enormous collective vote of thanks to all the therapists from around the world who visited us during the time that contact with South Africa was discouraged. They helped us develop a fund of knowledge, expertise and skills which we are now translating into ways of meeting the needs of the people of South Africa. It will come as no surprise to discover that those that visited us and became our role models and mentors are in fact among the true leaders of the world body – people who evaluate for themselves what is important, act on their beliefs and support and encourage the efforts of others.

Finally I would like to offer a verbatim transcription of outgoing WCPT President A J Fernando's brief farewell speech for your enjoyment and in response to Muriel Goodman's guest editorial of the May edition of your Journal which she calls "Challenges Facing the New South Africa".

Few people express their ideas so accurately, succinctly and with such warmth and humour as does President Fernando. This brief address was presented at the initial plenary session before Dr Hellen Hislop's inspirational keynote address "In Common Cause" which deals most excellently with the challenges facing our profession. President A J Fernando said:

"Let me start by quoting Thoreau who said 'Some things are obvious ..... like a trout in your milk.'

"What is obvious is that as a profession today we are facing governments progressively intolerant of professional arrogance, societies intolerant of professional elitism. What is obvious, is that as a profession in strangulating health care economies, we are not looking at bad times that will go away, we can not afford to wait for the good times – they are never coming back.

"To the profession, I would say, the only challenge we face is credibility, and where do you look for that credibility? I don't think it is in educational elitism or in credential arrogance. I don't think it's in technology. I think it will start at home - whether it is in Lahore of Balarat, Des Moines or in Winnipeg. Each and every one of us will have to start and rethink credibility for ourselves so that at the end of the next day's work we can sit back and say: That was good, that was a credible thing I did today. I profess to serve. I profess to care. I did that – and my patient was the source of my credibility. I knew when I went in there that I could explain to my patient what I anticipated as the outcome of whatever intervention that we had discussed. I feel good. It's credible because I can account for the outcome. I can measure it.

"That is the starting point of rethinking. If you take the obvious step further, I would like to suggest to you that it's time we said that credibility has to be in a valid context. It has to be in the context of the society I live in, the economics of my society and the cultural influences that guide my society. Then the next question becomes that the education you want should be the education you need to do the job in your society, in your economy. When you can answer that, you have credibility within that context.

"It's time, I think, that we re-focused. There are many influences as work, that are leading us astray, tempting us, seducing us, like technology that would have us believe that our skilled hands guided by intelligent reasoning minds (which we have always had) are suddenly not enough and that technology is more than tools. I don't think so. Within our profession there are people who would have us believe that before long neither you nor I would be permitted to move a patients arm in a particular direction unless we had paid a few hundred dollars and taken a course with a name that has now been patented.

We constantly have to be vigilant that we ourselves are not the enemy. That within the profession we are not creating problems because there is enough trouble out there. So I would say to you, let's rethink, let's look for the obvious, and the obvious is what is staring you in the face. Forget the trout in the milk, and the next time you hear the sound of galloping hooves, at least promise me you'll think horses first, before antelopes".

■ Pamela K Hansford, Physiotherapist♣