

Changing – and Challenging Times

Welcome to this issue of *Physiotherapy Ireland*.

As incoming Editor I wish to extend my thanks to the previous Hon. Scientific Editor Dr Ken Monaghan, and his Assistant Editor Ms Nessa Waters. Under Ken's stewardship *Physiotherapy Ireland* grown steadily, not only in terms of the number of submissions, but more importantly, in the quality of published papers. This is something that I, along with the current editorial board, am committed to continuing.

In November I had the pleasure of attending the 25th Annual Conference of ISCP, held in conjunction with the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, (NI). The conference was aptly entitled 'Forward together – meeting the challenge'. The opening address by President McAleese was inspiring,¹ she truly captured the thoughts, hopes and aspiration for the future of the profession. However, if physiotherapy is to rise to the challenges of the future, to grow and expand we must embrace the changing healthcare world we are in. The nature of healthcare delivery is changing, the focus is moving from secondary care to primary care with a greater emphasis on delivery in the community.²

Additionally professional roles are changing, however, with change comes opportunity. In this issue Moloney et al, report how a physiotherapist working in a specialist role can successfully carry out duties that would have previously been the responsibility of a Specialist Registrar in orthopaedics. In an environment of ever decreasing healthcare budgets, this study has important messages for all service managers. Changing working patterns are also addressed by Rooney in this issue, the local impact of the introduction of flexible working arrangements are identified as having a positive effect on staff morale, but these changes are not without their own difficulties.

I am delighted to present two invited commentaries from Professor Jeffrey Basford of the Mayo Clinic, USA and Professor Dave Baxter of the University of Otago, New Zealand. While these eminent academics present their own international perspective on rehabilitation research and physiotherapy education respectively. Their comments however, echo locally. Professor Basford emphasises the importance of priority setting, developing research capacity, and improving the evidence base of rehabilitation research, it is worth noting that the recently released National Therapy Research Strategy³ has as its first strategic goal to 'Develop Excellent Research Capacity and Resources in the Therapy Professions to undertake High Quality Research'. Another strategic goal emphasises the importance of building an evidence based culture within the therapy professions. The commonality between Professor Basford's comments and the National Therapy Research Strategy document demonstrate the international nature of the healthcare dynamics. Professor Baxter's comments on the global challenges in physiotherapy education also resonate at home when one considers the difficulties new physiotherapy graduates face.

There is perhaps no greater example of the globalisation of physiotherapy research or education than in research publication. There is an expectation among those who read and use research literature, that it is available almost immediately. More than that, for those clinicians and academics who produce research, there is a responsibility that it reaches the widest possible audience – in order that research findings can influence clinical practice. In this issue

O'Sullivan and Burns compare thigh muscle strength in female gaelic football players with and without previous hamstring injury, it could be argued that the audience for this research is fairly local, however, as O'Sullivan and Burns' point out, their results are very similar to the findings of work conducted in Australia.⁴ O'Sullivan and Burns' study would be of interest to their Australian counterparts, and it should be available. In a similar vein O'Connor reports on the effects of stretching on gastrocnemius flexibility assessed using real-time ultrasound. This is the first time that real-time ultrasound has been used to directly measure the length of the stretched muscle tissue before and after stretching. O'Connor's results and the methodology, used will be read with interest by other researchers planning to use this novel technique. Similar arguments could be made for all the papers published in the current issue; how can we ensure that we reach the widest possible audience for the material published in *Physiotherapy Ireland*? That is my challenge for the future.

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