

Council Meeting 2008

President's Address

The way forward – How and Why? (1)

The way forward has been the item on the agenda for this outgoing committee for the past 2 years. Not even enough time used to pass from the completion of a project, and we would be already thinking about the next project, the next meeting and the next opportunity.

Today, I am experiencing a mixture of emotions. Lessons have been learnt. The hard work and dedication put in by the members of the committee has clearly been implicated in our annual reports. We have a golden opportunity to be together today and take an interest in the development of our profession on a level that is not paralleled in our every day-to-day life. The enthusiasm of the members present coupled with the eagerness and willingness to participate in this project called MAP is a testament to the successes of our organisation. Yet we must be very careful not to fall victims of our success and humbly appreciate that we have only just started on our pathway to creating a national voice for the professional interests of our livelihood.

Before embarking on our mission forward, we must take stock, today, here and now of the difficulties and barriers to our development. We need to address these issues with a sense of urgency because it is ultimately up to us to *stand up and be counted*. We cannot rely on the mechanisms imposed by those factors regulating employment issues, because the short sightedness is equivocal for disaster. We cannot be content with a short term solution that seems to fit our current personal needs because we do not know what lies in wait tomorrow. We need coherence and harmony within the Malta Association of Physiotherapists – we need to build trust in the leadership but most of all we need to collaborate between us to identify our goals for the future. One year ago, I mentioned a plan to set out a Vision policy for MAP for the next ten years, and to be very honest, I did not receive the feedback that I was expecting. Partly because I may have faltered in communicating the issue properly, partly because it may have seemed to be closely linked to national political strategies, partly because we are still developing and may be the urgency was not felt by members, whatever the reasons, it is now the time to embark on this project, and it shall be a top priority on the Items of next years' agenda for the new committee. The recent events occurring on a national employment level such as the introduction of Specialist positions with the Department of Health and the granting of the Warrant on the 1st of January 2009 are testimony to this urgency.

We need to define the uniqueness of our practice and our professional purpose amongst others in the healthcare team. In most countries, a shift in the balance of health promotion and treatment of disease is usually paralleled with major reforms in the organisation of health services which need to establish a market-responsive health care team. As health care professionals, then, we are required to be accountable for the outcome of our practice and our use of resources. Our major resource is our knowledge. We build our knowledge through two main ways – knowledge that is developed by learning through practice and knowledge that is developed by study. Both of these are important at the same level and one cannot exist without the other. You are all called to participate in this dialogue by nature of your professional qualifications. Yet, do you feel part of it? Do you feel that you are having a say in the genetic make-up of your profession? Or it is simply a wait-and-see approach! It is no use being arm chair critics once the show is over. We have had enough of having

to lump what is being put forward to us, not because we are losing out today, but because we may be losing out tomorrow. We need to get involved. We need to have our voice and concerns heard and listened to. We need the support of each other to protect our professional investment.

'Policies of health which encourage partnerships and dialogue stress the practical nature of practice suggesting a professional responsibility which includes an informed synthesis of thinking and the ethics of professional life. The ultimate goal of physiotherapy provision is improvement of movement function to achieve an optimal quality of life for each person. The growth and development of physiotherapy depends upon maintaining a status, knowledge base and scope of practice which together ensure a credibility of professional purpose and competence in a changing healthcare environment. If we claim as a profession to be the most reliable authority on movement and mobility needs for independent living, we are challenged now to consider the ethics of professional practice and the need to engage in moral and civic purposes as befits a mature profession.' We cannot, not agree to this statement which by the way, is quoted word for word from Barbara Richardson's paper – back in 1999. Today in 2008, nearly 10 years later, where do we fit in as individuals with a professional responsibility? We need to take stock of what is happening around us, across our shores so that we may develop our professional commitment and not remain engrossed any more in our island state mentality where 'once it happens, it happens'.

Professional Action

Physiotherapy practice modes within a predominantly medically dominant structure need to be addressed through a de-centralisation of power in the provision of healthcare with a delegation of power focusing on the processes of professional action and decision-making. The underpinning concept is to empower and enable the physiotherapist professional to assume responsibility in these processes. Rapid development and changes will force the physiotherapist to perform new tasks which consider socio-cultural differences and include advising administration, adjusting to new health care situations, working in teams and using managerial skills. Addressing these tasks will feature, and already feature, high levels of uncertainty and complexity and will require professionalism. This shall be the role of the Malta Association of Physiotherapists. I shall ensure that our work will continue to shift from a role-focus to a task-centred focus. We have already been engaging within our Working Groups on the development of our Policy Documents that do serve as a strong foundation for our way forward.

We need to grasp the opportunities that come with confidence and strength underpinned with intelligent planning and careful consideration of the implications so that we will advance within healthcare as leading health care professionals.

Works Cited

1. *The way forward - how and why?* **Barbara Richardson**. 1999, *Advances in Physiotherapy*, Vol. 1, pp. 13-16.