

## REFLECTIONS ON MOVING PHYSIOTHERAPY FORWARD AS A MEMBER OF THE WCPT EXECUTIVE BOARD

The slogan for the WCPT's strategic plan is *Growing, unifying, moving physical therapy forward* and the hashtag for the plan is *#wcptmoveforward*. When I reflect BACK on my 12 years as a member of the WCPT's Executive Board there is a multitude of ways in which the profession has moved forward internationally over that time whilst at the same time growing in numbers and unifying by working to our strengths.

My first and second four-year terms on the Executive were as the member elected by the WCPT member organisations in the Asia Western Pacific (AWP) Region. Whilst the role requires Executive to act in the best interest on the global profession, through my previous role as AWP Chair, I had already established relationships with a number of young member organisations and others who were striving to become members in the AWP region, so I could use that knowledge to nurture others. As chair of the Membership Committee it has always been a pleasure to watch the development of organisations and mentor them on their journeys towards membership. The greatest thrill is to see the flags raised for new member organisations such as Myanmar and Papua New Guinea, at the welcome during the General Meeting.

One of the other key areas in which I have had a major role in helping physiotherapy move forward, has been the establishment of the Accreditation Committee and the work undertaken by education experts from around the world to review entry level professional; physiotherapy programmes. Unlike New Zealand, there are many countries that do not have their own regulation authority, or if they do, the universities are looking for a pathway to a global standard of education, which the Accreditation Service can offer through its reviews.

In terms of moving forward in its international relations during my time on Executive, WCPT has developed strong relationships with other key health professional organisations through its membership of the World Health Professions Alliance (WHPA). One of the collaborations by the WHPA to produce the Health Improvement Card<sup>1</sup>. This is a simple tool, which empowers individuals to work with their health care professional to establish personal

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<sup>1</sup> WHPA Health Improvement Card <https://www.wcpt.org/news/New-WHPA-app-Nov14>

health goals and to track their progress to reduce their risks associated with non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

WCPT has been in official relations with the World Health Organization (WHO) since 1952. However, the importance of that relationship currently is unprecedented, given that the greatest cause of globally mortality is diseases of lifestyle. Many WCPT projects, individual physiotherapists, and the combined voice of WHPA contribute to and support the work of WHO, by helping to shape policy, participating on WHO's projects and supporting the production and dissemination of WHO's disability and rehabilitation resources. It has been an honour to be the voice of WCPT at some of the WHO Assemblies and to speak in support of a range of activities that aim to improve health and wellbeing of the global population. For example the opportunity to speak in favour of the 50 Priority Assistive Products<sup>2</sup>, a project aimed at improving global access to assistive products for everyone, everywhere. Access to assistive technology offers a public health solution across the world. For people of all ages access to the products will improve their independence, assist with their mobility and importantly improve physical activity levels.

Following the General Meeting in Singapore, in 2015, the Executive embarked on wide ranging consultation *Look forward Together* as part of the development of a new strategic plan, which is ambitious, but will move physiotherapy forward to ensure that the profession is not only better understood by decision makers and fund holders, but also plays to the strengths of what the profession does well. The effectiveness of physical therapy in preventing and managing NCDs and associated risk factors, as well as in healthy aging, management of chronic pain and mental health, is well evidenced. World Physiotherapy Day, now celebrated each year on or around the 8<sup>th</sup> September, has become one of the best opportunities the international profession has to market itself and promote these priority areas for health and wellbeing.

A major change in the international calendar was the Executive's decision to move to a biennial rather than quadrennial congress. The key reasoning behind our decision was to make the congresses more accessible to the profession and to give physiotherapists more opportunity to share new knowledge and best practice ideas. The first of the biennial

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<sup>2</sup> WHO GATE [https://www.who.int/phi/implementation/assistive\\_technology/en/](https://www.who.int/phi/implementation/assistive_technology/en/)

congresses was held in Cape Town, South Africa in 2017. This was the first time a WCPT congress had been held in the Africa Region and it exceeded our expectations with over 25% of the delegates coming from the Africa Region. The previous figure had been 4%. The Congress in Geneva in May, 2019 has the record for the highest number of delegates. The congress to be held in Dubai in 2021 will provide a more affordable opportunity for physiotherapists from the member organisations in close proximity, to attend.

My 12 years as a WCPT Executive member has been an enriching experience with lasting memories of times spent with colleagues at WCPT General Meetings and Congresses and also with member organisations in their own countries, savouring their own culture and hospitality. I am grateful to Physiotherapy New Zealand for their willingness to support my nomination for each of my three terms on the Executive. I am proud of WCPT's achievements and the influence that I, and colleagues I have worked with on the Executive, have had in moving the profession forward internationally. I am confident that as I stand down from the Executive I am leaving your profession in good hands.

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