

Obituary Bryan Paynter

Bryan Paynter was Editor of the NZJP from 1987 until 1996, and appropriately due to his passion for the correct use of the English language, remained as copy editor until his death in April this year. He was widely read and had a vast knowledge of English literature evident by the frequent use of succinct quotes to reinforce his point.

It is timely to reflect on some of the key themes he discussed during his time as editor. He was a great believer in the journal, which he saw as a permanent medium for communication and debate between professional people, regularly encouraging physiotherapists to submit to the journal and engage in debate on topics that had been published. The lack of contributions was an ongoing concern to him as was the inability of submitters to adhere to the guidelines for submission – an ongoing issue for the current editorial committee!

During the period of time he was writing New Zealand physiotherapists were still governed by the Physiotherapy Act 1949, the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance (HPCA) Act not coming into effect until 2003. There was robust debate in the journal on what health care professionals, especially physiotherapists, were. Bryan expressed concern that the very broad definition that existed allowed other groups promoting “alternative” therapies to move into areas previously thought the domain of physiotherapy and this left the public vulnerable to misinformation:

“People sincerely seeking appropriate therapeutic assistance are entitled to be able to distinguish between the genuine and spurious, especially since a vocal and not necessarily unintelligent minority are ever eager to promulgate the supposed virtues of the bizarre and the unorthodox” (Paynter 1987).

He embraced the advent of university-based education for physiotherapists on the basis that a university education “depends not so much on presenting facts, but on stimulating those undertaking it how to find them out” (Paynter 1990). He hoped that university-based education would lead to a growth in physiotherapy research by physiotherapists, and he was right. The NZJP has benefited from the continuing increase in physiotherapy research which is frequently submitted to the journal for publication.

He was very aware, however, of the need for physiotherapists, despite the knowledge they had acquired, to be compassionate caring professionals taking time to listen to their patients, even if it involved a long and seemingly irrelevant history. As he wisely stated:

“Being listened to can itself be a major part of the therapeutic programme, and if the patient feels the need to discuss not only symptoms, but the circumstances in which they occurred, we have to accept it.” (Paynter 1987).

He also emphasised the need for physiotherapists, despite their scientific knowledge, to ensure that the information they gave to their patients was presented in language they could understand and that treatment outcomes focused on problems relevant to the patient. His example remains relevant today:

“It is possibly very scientific to note that the patient (Caucasian, female, 75, widow, post fracture @ humerus) has only 85 degrees of shoulder abduction. What goes beyond the observation and measurement is that Mrs Slattery cannot yet do her hair, do up her bra strap, hang up the washing ... nor is there anyone at home to help her.” (Paynter 1994).

In his final editorial he reiterated his hope that the journal would become a vehicle for professional communication and reflecting on his time as editor stated: “I am not certain that this wish was fulfilled to the extent I would have desired” (Paynter 1995).

Times change and there are many new forums for people to share professional knowledge, yet the journal continues, supported by a healthy number of contributions. The decision in 2003 to make the NZJP open access and consequently freely available on the Physiotherapy New Zealand website has meant it is now more widely accessed and read. Hopefully it continues to be a vehicle for professional debate within New Zealand and beyond. I am sure Bryan would agree: “Ignorance is the curse of God; knowledge is the wing wherewith we fly to heaven” (Shakespeare 1590).

And to end, a few notes sent to the Editor from Bryan: “They need a course in distinguishing ‘practice’ (noun) and ‘practise’ (verb). But they are not alone there!”; “I had to sprinkle a few commas about in both papers to nullify some possible ambiguities.”; “A few minor infelicities only!”

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