

Editorial

Grand ideas!

‘No grand idea was ever born in a conference, but a lot of foolish ideas have died there’

F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940).

The first congress of the World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT) took place in London in 1953. Since then the profession has grown and changed. In 1953 there were physiotherapists from 12 member organisations taking part compared to 92 in 2003. While there remain differences and similarities around the world one thing is certain, there is a clear common purpose to provide high quality effective patient-centred care. With the upcoming 15th International Congress of the WCPT perhaps the physiotherapy profession should seize the opportunity to prove F. Scott Fitzgerald wrong. Surely a collective gathering of thousands of physiotherapists from around the world can pool their professional knowledge, experience, commitment and enthusiasm to pursue a number of *Grand Ideas*.

The WCPT congress aims to: be the preeminent international forum for exchange of physiotherapy research and discussion of professional issues; reflect the diversity of the international profession; attract international interest and participation; and contribute to the ongoing development of WCPT. This focuses on deliverables for the event itself, but a meeting such as this offers opportunities and benefits that extend far beyond the congress. Taking the congress aims can we generate some *Grand Ideas* that ensure the future success of the profession and high quality, responsive and effective care for the patients and communities with which we work?

While conferences alone are not an effective way of changing practice they offer an important opportunity for the dissemination of research findings [1]. But so much more can come from a short platform presentation or poster display. With the congress including special interest as well as original research abstracts there will be opportunities to discuss and engage in lively debate about professional issues as well as the practice implications of the latest research. What about the serendipity of the chance meeting of like minds and the impromptu conversations that arise from informal networking? Many research collaborations are born in this

way and surely *Grand Ideas* can result. What of the opportunity to build collaborations across continents and the more established research communities and organisations providing support to those in developing areas? This could make a real difference in developing clinically applicable research relevant to local populations. Research undertaken in one setting may not readily translate to another because of variations in study participants, demographics and socioeconomic issues, but the methodologies may be.

What is different about an international physiotherapy conference? Internationally the profession is diverse in terms of its scientific, education, practice and policy perspectives. This diversity can enrich and enlighten. For some it has provided a life changing experience that has the potential to generate some *Grand Ideas* [2]. What value can be placed on the interaction between internationally respected researchers, practitioners, managers, policy makers and educators? There is so much to be mutually shared and learned among physiotherapists from different sectors of the profession and different countries. It is not simply what physiotherapists in developing countries can learn and benefit from their more established colleagues, but how they in turn can share with and enlighten others as a result of their own experiences. In this way the profession can grow on the global health stage together, thereby improving world health.

The International Society of Physiotherapy Journal Editors (ISPJE) will be holding their inaugural meeting at the WCPT congress. Such an auspicious gathering of people from international journals has the potential to be an extremely fertile ground for *Grand Ideas*. For example, the Health InterNetwork Access to Research Initiative (HINARI) programme enables individuals in developing countries to gain access to one of the world's largest collections of biomedical and health literature. It was set up by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and major publishers. While over 3503 journal titles are now available to health institutions in 113 countries, benefiting many thousands of health workers and researchers, and in turn, contributing to improved world health, there are less than 10 journals listed of direct relevance to physiotherapy [3]. The Physiotherapy journal is

among these, as is the Australian Journal of Physiotherapy, but there are many other national and international physiotherapy journals that are missing. The combined efforts of our journal editors could make a significant difference to this valuable resource and in doing so contribute to the ongoing development of the profession and improved patient care.

While journal editors might pursue avenues to widen access to the literature, others might consider how to develop appropriate Information Technology infrastructure in those countries where it is still a long trek to an internet café with unreliable connections just to receive an e-mail, let alone access the latest research article. Surely a gathering of physiotherapists from around the world can use their collective resources to start to tackle this.

A congress can provide vital support to new researchers as they establish their initial personal and scientific connections. Presenters reach a wide and varied audience, benefiting from peer-review, feedback, and collaboration opportunities. Delegates benefit from international experience and expertise, all on one site, learning about physiotherapy practice in different countries. A diverse scientific programme that utilises different session formats that incorporates not only platform abstracts and posters of original research, but also pre- and post-congress courses, focused symposia, workshops, discussion panels, clinical visits, poster discussion and informal networking sessions will ensure that there are relevant sessions for physiotherapists no matter their particular interest.

Congress will show case the best of physiotherapy. Not just in terms of the latest high quality research but also the camaraderie that is at the heart of the profession. Not only will there be the current leaders from across many fields of physiotherapy, but the leaders of the future. Let us seize the opportunity that this congress offers, generate some *Grand Ideas* and turn them into reality. This reality may be some way off, but we only have to look at how far the profession has come since its first international congress in 1953 to know that our efforts will be worth it.

References

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- [2] Romani W. How a WCPT Congress changed my professional life. *WCPT News* 2006;March:7.
- [3] See website: <http://www.who.int/hinari/en/> [accessed 4 January 2007].

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