

A Different Kind of Global Warming

I confess. I registered for the 15th International Congress of the World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT) meeting in Vancouver, BC, to participate in a session for more than 40 editors of physical therapy journals and newsletters from around the world. And the session was wonderful! We adopted a constitution and became the International Society of Physiotherapy Journal Editors. It was remarkable to see a diverse international group come to agreement in less than 2 hours about the need to enhance collaboration among our journals and to improve standards of publication within the field of physical therapy.

When I removed my “editor in chief” blinders, however, I realized that attending WCPT was important for a larger reason. More than 3,500 physical therapists from about 80 countries participated in programs that offered excellent science as well as relevant discussion on professional and practice issues. It was a privilege to be in the audience when Marilyn and Jessica Rothstein accepted the WCPT's Mildred Elson Award on behalf of Dr Jules Rothstein, Editor in Chief Emeritus of **PTJ**. The Secretary General of WCPT, Brenda Myers, described Jules so well that I was sure he was in the auditorium with us; it was clear that she had spent time with him and valued him as a friend and colleague. I learned that Mildred Elson, an American, was the first WCPT president and that the Elson Award is the organization's highest award recognizing outstanding and sustained leadership. Marilyn Moffat, PT, PhD, FAPTA, received the Elson award in 2003 and this year was named the 12th president of WCPT. I was so proud; Americans were viewed as good guys again!

I was impressed by the general enthusiasm at the meeting and the caliber of the discussions at the platform and poster sessions. There were more than 3,000 presentations, and every presenter had an audience that asked excellent questions. The theme of the meeting was “moving physical therapy forward,” and it was clear that physical therapist scientists around the world are working to provide evidence to do just that.

For me, 3 issues emerged from WCPT:

- **To “move physical therapy forward,” collaboration across borders is essential.** If our goal is to foster “best practice,” an intervention should be effective *everywhere*. Because the “control” group in randomized studies is not as meaningful with physical interventions and is viewed as unethical in some cases, why not compare interventions delivered in different countries? For instance, comparing intervention A and intervention B across multiple countries might help determine whether modifying factors (eg, clinical setting and cultural differences) have an effect. If the ultimate goal of WCPT is global health,¹ isn't research across borders an effective way to address this goal?

- **US physical therapists need to become more facile with the use of the *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)*.**² The World Health Organization's framework for measuring health and disability, the ICF, served as the common language for comparing outcomes of clinical studies at the WCPT sessions. Are physical therapists in the United States as comfortable with the ICF as our international colleagues? The US medical community is finally being encouraged to adopt the ICF. Alan Jette, PT, PhD, FAPTA, **PTJ**'s former Acting Editor in Chief, was chair of the Committee on Disability in America for the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies. In the prepublication copy of the committee's report, *The Future of Disability in America*,³ Alan and his colleagues recommend adopting the ICF as the conceptual framework for disability monitoring and research in the United States.
- **More US physical therapists should be active participants in WCPT.** The next meeting takes place in 4 years in Amsterdam. I know, I know...we have too many meetings to attend. There are district, state, and national APTA conferences; continuing education courses; and other professional meetings. But WCPT will stretch your horizons (literally) to make you think about physical therapy from a global perspective.

Approximately 250,000 physical therapists from 101 countries participate in WCPT. I was honored to be counted as a participant in the Vancouver meeting.

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References

- 1 About WCPT. World Confederation for Physical Therapy Web site. Available at: <http://www.wcpt.org/about/index>. Accessed July 2, 2007.
- 2 World Health Organization. *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health: ICF*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization; 2001.
- 3 Field MJ, Jette A, eds; Committee on Disability in America. *The Future of Disability in America*. Washington, DC: Institute of Medicine. In press. Available at: <http://www.iom.edu/CMS/3740/25335/42494.aspx>. Accessed July 2, 2007.

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