24 March 2020

Dear friends and colleagues

Ten months ago, in a room in Geneva with 5,000 physiotherapists, I shared this Irish proverb – ‘it is in the shelter of each other that the people live’. None of us imagined where we would be one year later, in the midst of a pandemic that will affect every single physiotherapist in our global community one way or another.

We will lose loved ones. Physiotherapists will come back into practice and others may move into different areas of practice. Some will be unable to practice and this will ultimately mean that businesses will close and people will lose their jobs. The education of our students will be changed irrevocably. Some of our students in their final months of study will enter the workforce earlier than planned and will be asked to rise to challenges never dreamt of in their earlier years.

I wrote another time that ‘in the shelter of each other, we do not just live, we thrive and grow’ and now ‘shelter’ is being redefined because to stop this virus, we must be apart. Yet we will still shelter each other, as we grieve losses both personal and professional and despite the shock, the stress and the hardship, what I know about this profession and this global community is that we will serve our communities and we will support one another.

The staff and board of WCPT stand in solidarity with our member organisations and their members and the wider healthcare community at this time. At the moment, we are gathering resources and sharing them with the global community, working with our subgroups to assist in whatever knowledge resources need to be developed by them. We are supporting our member organisations in their advocacy efforts and we are establishing a global education taskforce to consider the current and wider consequences for physiotherapist entry to practice education.

Our thoughts and prayers are with each one of our community. What the next months will bring is unclear but we ‘Believe that further shore is reachable from here’. What the further shore looks like for us personally and as a profession, we do not know. All I can be sure of is that when we reach it, when we next meet together as a community, we will be changed but the meeting will be all the richer because of the storms we have weathered.

For now, stay safe and well.

Emma

‘Believe that further shore is reachable from here’ is from Seamus Heaney’s The Cure at Troy

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The World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT) represents the physical therapy profession worldwide. WCPT is registered in the UK as a charity.