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CONTENTS

Information Sources in Physiotherapy — S. F. Rossouw	5
Presenting Research in a Scientific Article — Jo. M. Barnes	10
Sampling Bias in Physiotherapy Research — J. A. Hendry	16
Headloading in Africa: Preliminary Findings on the Locomotor Effects of Occupational Headload Carriage — J. Charteris, P. A. Scott, J. C. Wall	19
Education and Research	25
News of Courses and Congresses ...	24
Correspondence	27
Professional Advertisements	28
Book Reviews	30

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EDITORIAL

Most of this issue is devoted to the subject of research. The Shorter Oxford Dictionary defines research as "an investigation directed to the discovery of some fact by careful study of a subject; a course of critical or scientific inquiry".¹

The large majority of clinical physiotherapists regard themselves as "doers". Research is not regarded as a part of their work — it is done by the academics in the university departments. The treatment of patients is of prime importance. The undergraduate project is the first and usually last contact they make with "research". After all one is paid to treat patients!

In hospital practice, the physiotherapist is classified as a technician. If you are only a "doer", this is exactly what you are. The fact that you accept responsibility for the patients' treatment, is beside the point. Physiotherapists must *think* as well as *do*.

Research is "a course of *critical* or *scientific* inquiry". Are you critical of accepted treatments? Do they really work? If so, why? If not, why not? What can be done to improve the effectiveness of a technique? You have a tremendous advantage over most of the academic staff because you see so many patients. You can see whether a treatment regimen is effective or not. Run a clinical trial to prove the validity of what you are doing. This will increase your commitment to the work as well as improving the status of the profession.

The articles in this issue should give some assistance to anyone wanting to start a research project. Dr. Rossouw's article on information sources is absolutely basic to any attempt at research. You must be *au fait* with the most recent work in your field. Duplication of work is a waste of time. Other people's ideas may stimulate you to further study or to go off in an altogether different direction.

The article on "bias" gives you some idea of the pitfalls of setting up a clinical trial. And of course the work must eventually be written up. Mrs. Barnes' article is a very

clear exposition of how to write about your project.

Do not be intimidated by the very thought of "research". Most of the movement techniques in use today are the result of the physiotherapist asking herself what she was doing and why it worked. Be critical of what you do. Very few physiotherapy techniques have had their effectiveness adequately tested. Always be ready to query the facts. You have an interesting time ahead of you.

L. M. Davids

References

1. Onions CT. ed. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973.

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