



Personal objectives

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To cite this article: Marilyn A. Harrison (1988) Personal objectives, Physiotherapy Practice, 4:1, 1-2, DOI: [10.3109/09593988809161434](https://doi.org/10.3109/09593988809161434)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.3109/09593988809161434>



Published online: 10 Jul 2009.



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EDITORIAL

Personal objectives

Physiotherapists today find themselves in a world considerably more complex than it used to be. The simple days of the physiotherapist and the patient forming a relationship in order to facilitate treatment seem to have been replaced. More knowledgeable clients or consumers are 'sucked into' categories, be they Diagnostic Related Groups or some other convenient matching set, so that they may be channelled through systems which have been 'tested' for efficiency enabling the largest number of the population to be processed in the shortest possible time at the least cost to the health scheme or insurance company.

Against this pressured management background the profession is seeking greater academic attainment and status. Individual expectations for professional development are increasing all the time. There has been a significant growth in specialisation with some countries already having tests for validating advanced clinical competence. The importance of research is paramount in establishing the scientific base for professional practice and professional autonomy is seen as the ultimate goal.

Where is the reality for the 'average' practising clinical therapist?

In all countries there are continuing demographic changes in the population over time. There will be different diseases with their related problems and differing levels of physiotherapy care around the world. Some countries have developed highly specialised practice, some of it in line with the very latest technology.

The present decade has brought increasing economic restraint with a shortage of qualified staff in most areas. Many countries have tightened up the management of health services to such an extent that there is a very real danger of improved efficiency becoming confused with effectiveness.

Physiotherapists have an ethical code of practice. We all share the objective of providing the most effective physiotherapy management for our patients—clients, whether it be by the skills we have in our hands, or the expertise and advice we impart from our academic background. We have a professional integrity which we must safeguard.

We have to learn the size of a manageable case-load so that realistic objectives may be achieved. To attempt to do more than this manageable amount of work is to achieve nothing. It cheats our patients—clients and wastes a valuable resource. Physiotherapists must learn how to prioritise and how to say 'no'. Inexperienced physiotherapists must be helped by the experienced to determine their case-load. No surgeon is expected to complete only half a surgical procedure, yet how many times are physiotherapists expected to do more and yet more.

Every physiotherapist has a professional duty to keep up to date with modern practice and should keep an open mind. Modern practice should be influenced by research findings where they are known to be valid. If physiotherapists plan their objectives well and meet them, effectiveness and quality care will follow.

There will always be a shortage of qualified staff so physiotherapists must not be afraid to educate other carers and to encourage the patient—client to take responsibility for his or her own management wherever possible.

In our search for a high degree of professionalism, increasing academic achievement and autonomy, let us remember the simple things which every physiotherapist can achieve.

Let us never forget our basic humanity and empathy with those for whom we care.

Let us be courteous and yet with a sense of humour.

Let us remember to listen to what our patients tell us and only then to plan our treatment programmes jointly with them.

Let us go about our work with quiet confidence, devoid of arrogance, taking pride in a job well done.

Let us make sure that we always update our skills by never ceasing to learn throughout our professional life. In return for the privilege of gaining those skills, let us share them with those of our colleagues who have yet to attain them.

Let us always question our own practice. If what we are doing is ineffective, then it should be discarded.

Let us be open to new ideas.

Let us not be afraid to defend our practice and if outside forces attempt to prevent the maintenance of a personal high standard we should look to use of skills elsewhere. The expertise of a competent physiotherapist will always be required somewhere.

In the words of Abraham Lincoln—
'Whatever are you—be the best one.'

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