

Six decades of moving the profession forward

60



World Confederation
for Physical Therapy

“The World Health Organization congratulates WCPT on its 60th anniversary, and applauds the continuing and productive partnership between our two organisations. WHO is committed to promoting access to and quality of rehabilitation services worldwide, and recognises the important contribution WCPT has made to advancing global health, improving individual functioning and promoting physical therapy.”

Etienne Krug, Director of the Department for Violence and Injury Prevention and Disability, WHO

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INTRODUCTION FROM THE PRESIDENT

Considering our achievements over the past four years is encouraging. Looking back at our achievements over 60 years is astonishing. This publication does both, and as the current President of WCPT, I'm proud to be able to feel part of the history of the first and only global body representing all physical therapists.

Sixty years ago, WCPT started with 11 member organisations. Now it has over 100. It started communicating by letter and telephone calls. Now it networks on a daily basis and has one of the most informative and accessible websites of any health organisation in the world. Sixty years ago, the profession's fight for global recognition was just beginning. Now it has been welcomed as an equal partner with the global organisations representing physicians, dentists, pharmacists and nurses through the World Health Professions Alliance.

One has to be careful not to be too complacent about progress. The profession is still struggling for recognition in too many parts of the world. And the battles that some physical therapists have to fight to get even the most basic of care to their patients and clients still disturb me. However, I have found it immensely encouraging in the past four years that increasing numbers of physical therapy organisations have been able to take the policies, guidelines and resources that WCPT has produced to governments and influential figures, and achieve real change. Recently, various member organisations – those in Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, Bermuda and Israel all spring to mind – have invited WCPT to support their efforts to improve the profession's standing. What we've said, and the WCPT documents we've been able to provide in support of our case, has resulted in some dramatic changes in attitude from policy makers.

There is still an immense amount to do, and a good deal to put right. For all the growing global influence of the profession, it is still a matter of considerable frustration to me that widely used global definitions of physical therapy are outdated and underplay the professional status of physical therapy. Proposals to address global health needs and



“Sixty years ago, the profession's fight for global recognition was just beginning. Now it has been welcomed as an equal partner with the global organisations representing physicians, dentists, pharmacists and nurses.”


Marilyn Moffat, President

shortages of health personnel in some countries continue to ignore the importance of strong, sustainable and qualified professionals as the foundation of quality services.

Physical therapists were not technicians when WCPT was founded, and they are certainly not now. At a time when the growing human and financial tolls of non-communicable or lifestyle-related diseases such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease are global concerns, there needs to be wider acknowledgement of the contribution that physical therapists can make, and are making, to keeping populations healthy and reducing health costs.

As WCPT President, I've visited countries with very small numbers of physical therapists and those with many thousands. Wherever I've gone, I've seen the same commitment to making things better – whatever the location and whatever the resources available. WCPT has always shared that commitment, and always will, supporting and leading efforts to improve.

In my early days as a practitioner, I had the good fortune to know Mildred Elson – WCPT's first President. She was one of the profession's first great international leaders with the vision to see that there were benefits for all of us in bringing physical therapists around the world together, and obviously she had a great influence on me. In the 1950s there was a limit to what she, and her successors, could do. They made invaluable inroads into curriculum guidelines and ethical principles. But today, with WCPT having so many member organisations, and with technology allowing instantaneous communication with large numbers around the world, we can do, and are doing, so much more. The activity described in this publication testifies to that. I believe Mildred Elson would be proud.



Marilyn Moffat
WCPT President

Part 1: *Achievement in the past four years*

“The new resources we have produced, the conferences and new alliances we have joined in, all allow us to work more effectively with and for member organisations, and chart a course for the future. But there’s much more to be done.”

Brenda Myers, WCPT Secretary General

In 2007, a new chapter in WCPT's history opened, when a successful world congress in Vancouver, Canada, along with a subscription fee increase approved at the General Meeting, created a firm financial footing on which the Confederation could build. With a host of calls to action from the General Meeting, and an ambitious strategic plan laid out by the new Executive Committee, this has been four years that has seen WCPT significantly step up its projects, communications and rate of document production.

As a confederation of member organisations, it is a fundamental tenet of WCPT that it does all it can to meet the needs of all its members, whether large or small, resource-rich or resource-poor. So financial investment, time and energy during those four years have been concentrated on projects that serve the global physical therapy community, not just one part of it.

Educational issues have been a priority, and WCPT has pushed forward on producing new resources on professional education and regulation that will serve the profession in driving up professional standards and care around the world. There has also been much activity to make WCPT the global communications hub for the profession, with new and reinvigorated online publications and a new WCPT website that provides a major information resource.

The world changes fast, and WCPT has always been determined to act on change. This has never been more true than in recent years, when global shifts in communications, workforce patterns and disease have required decisive action by all health professions and their representative bodies.

So over the past four years, WCPT has also responded to new concerns and global change: concerns about skill shortages in healthcare; changing patterns of professional migration; the changing job market in health care; the need for member organisations to engage members and raise awareness of WCPT; new technologies for communicating.

"We have achieved a great deal over the past four years," says WCPT Secretary General Brenda Myers. "The new resources we have produced, the conferences and new alliances we have joined in, all allow us to work more effectively with and for member organisations, and chart a course for the future."

"But there's much more to be done. For the future, we need to look more closely at how we can support member organisations as they try to implement the policies, guidelines and initiatives that WCPT is recommending."

Addressing education issues

In 2007, the WCPT General Meeting approved a new "Guideline for physical therapist professional entry level education". In the years following, WCPT has also developed three new guidelines, on areas that complement this: accreditation, faculty qualifications and clinical education. The intent is to support efforts to maintain and raise standards of physical therapy education globally.



Rohafza, a physical therapist at the International Committee of the Red Cross Orthopaedic Centre in Kabul, Afghanistan, helps a child put on an orthotic device. Picture: M Kocic/ICRC.

REGIONAL CHAIRS 2007-2011

Esther Nkandu	Africa
Savita Ravindra	Asia Western Pacific
Antonio Lopes and Sarah Bazin	Europe
Stacy de Gale	North America Caribbean
David Lopez Sanchez	South America

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2007-2011

Marilyn Moffat	President
Zola Dantile	Vice President
Sylvia Kambalmetore	Africa Region
Margot Skinner	Asia Western Pacific Region
Emma Stokes	European Region
Sandra Thornhill	North America Caribbean Region
Mabel Yvonne Espinel Gonzalez	South America Region

WCPT SUBGROUPS 2007-2011

International Acupuncture Association of Physical Therapists	www.wcpt.org/iaapt
International Association of Physical Therapists working with Older People	www.wcpt.org/iptop
International Federation of Orthopaedic Manipulative Physical Therapists	www.wcpt.org/ifompt
International Federation of Sports Physiotherapy	www.wcpt.org/ifsp
International Organisation of Physical Therapists in Paediatrics	www.wcpt.org/iptp
International Organization of Physical Therapists in Women's Health	www.wcpt.org/iptwh
International Private Practitioners Association	www.wcpt.org/ippa

The guidelines are: a guideline for a standard evaluation process for accreditation/recognition of physical therapist professional entry-level education programmes; a guideline for qualifications of faculty for physical therapist professional entry level programmes; and a guideline for the clinical education component of physical therapist entry level education.

The guidelines are tools, rather than policy statements, and are aimed at member organisations wishing to develop and raise standards in their country, or start new programmes. They are also valuable to those countries where there is no physical therapy association, or no physical therapy education programme, and the profession is not represented in WCPT. They provide a means by which the profession can be built up according to internationally agreed standards and will play an important role in developing programmes and supporting the growth of the profession in under-served areas.

WCPT has also produced a new guideline for delivering quality continuing professional development for physical therapists.

All the new education guidelines are due to be presented to the 2011 General Meeting in Amsterdam.

Forging new campaigning alliances

In May 2010, WCPT became a member of the World Health Professions Alliance (WHPA) – an alliance of the International Council of Nurses, the International Pharmaceutical Federation, the World Dental Federation and the World Medical Association. The WHPA represents more than 26 million health professionals worldwide.

“By joining a global voice for health professionals, WCPT is gaining more influence on campaigning issues, and has new opportunities to inform initiatives that could benefit millions of patients and service users,” said WCPT President Marilyn Moffat.

As part of the WHPA, for example, WCPT has urged action to end the counterfeiting of medicines and other medical products. The alliance has also launched a campaign drawing attention to the growing burden of non communicable diseases, calling for a global action strategy to confront them. It has also launched a project on collaborative practice. More details are available at www.whpa.org.

WCPT joined with the American Physical Therapy Association and the Canadian Physiotherapy Association to organise an international policy summit on direct access and advanced scope of practice in physical therapy, held in Washington DC, the United States, in October 2009. Professional representatives from member organisations in 18 countries drew attention to research showing that patient self-referral to physical therapy results in better health outcomes, more timely care, higher patient satisfaction and lower costs.

WCPT undertook a survey of its member organisations to develop a global picture of physical therapy direct access and patient self-referral. The WCPT website now has resources to support self-referral, and a new policy statement will be considered at the 2011 General Meeting.

Addressing regulation issues

WCPT has been part of a global, interprofessional forum to explore the future of regulation in health care systems. With the World Health Professions Alliance, it jointly hosted both the first and the second World Conference on Health Professions Regulation held in Geneva in 2008 and 2010. The conferences brought together health professionals and government officials from around the world to discuss different models of health professional regulation, and the way that regulatory bodies best function. They highlighted the fact that regulation is essential to safe, high quality patient care.

Since 2007, the WCPT Executive Committee has been working towards a model practice act which will assist member organisations working towards professional regulation in their countries. This evolved into a new “Guideline for the development of a system of legislation/regulation/recognition, such as a Physical Therapy Practice Act”, which was sent out for consultation in July 2009 and is due to be presented at the General Meeting in 2011, along with a new regulation policy statement.

Forging new links between physical therapists

WCPT achieved a major landmark in 2007 when the number of member organisations broke 100. The total number of members after the General Meeting in Amsterdam is expected to exceed 105.

WCPT is building itself as the hub of an international communication network for this rapidly growing global community. These efforts, centring around the WCPT website and the internet, have taken off in the past four years.

It has been a priority for WCPT to develop its website as a means of providing resources to, and promoting communication among, physical therapists and their organisations. A complete restructuring and redesign of the website was completed in April 2009, making it more interactive, user-friendly and comprehensive. WCPT President Marilyn Moffat launched the new website at a reception in WCPT’s London headquarters, applauding it for its clarity.

New publications have been integrated into this development of communications. WCPT has launched its monthly E-Update – an emailed news bulletin sent to all member organisations and others who have contact with WCPT. It has also launched a Congress Update, with news of the forthcoming event in Amsterdam.

The Confederation’s newsletter, WCPT News, was relaunched in 2009 as an online publication, integrated into the pages of the new WCPT website and also available to download. As a result, WCPT News has become better-read than ever. There are also new opportunities to contribute and share experiences through discussion forums.

The impact of these changes is already obvious. The average number of page views per month went up from 23,000 in 2008 to 62,000 in 2010. The number of people wishing to receive WCPT News and E-Updates has risen from 5,000 in 2009 to 10,000 in 2011. WCPT’s Facebook page has over 5,000 followers. The world of physical therapy has truly got talking.



Top image: Physical therapy students at Masterskill College in Malaysia celebrating World Physical Therapy Day in 2009.



Left image: World PT Day events in Nepal in 2010 included demonstrations of how physical therapists could improve quality of life in older people.

Right image: Physical therapy students from India put on national dress and performed traditional dancing during the opening ceremony of WCPT's Asia Western Pacific Congress, held in Mumbai in January 2009.



World PT Day: promoting physical therapy's role

Over the past four years, WCPT has made it a priority to call for increasing use to be made of physical therapy in the worldwide battle against obesity and non-communicable diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and hypertension. As a position statement passed at the 2007 General Meeting said: "As experts in movement and exercise... physical therapists are the ideal professionals to promote, guide, prescribe and manage exercise activities and efforts."

WCPT and its member organisations have made major efforts to raise awareness of the vital role of physical therapy in these fields. Their activities have centred around World Physical Therapy Day, held every year on 8th September. Since 2007, WCPT has helped member organisations raise the profile of the profession in their countries under the theme of "Movement for Health" by providing materials for World PT Day (originally established by WCPT in 1995). It wanted to galvanise activity afresh, particularly among those member organisations which did not already hold events to mark the solidarity of the physical therapy community.

Leaving scope for member organisations to concentrate on areas of physical therapy of their choosing, WCPT provided practical information on organising events and getting publicity, along with resource materials providing facts, quotations and research evidence on physical therapists' role in combating lifestyle-related diseases. It also provided ready-made articles, stickers, posters, logos and press releases for member organisations to use freely.

The results have been remarkable. In 2009, physical therapists in a third of WCPT's member organisations, representing tens of thousands of physical therapists, organised publicity or an event to mark the day. Using the material provided by WCPT to demonstrate the contribution that physical therapists can make to combat child obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, age-related decline and HIV/AIDS, many aimed to put the profession on a firmer footing in their countries. Governments in some countries have made a commitment to change as a result of the campaigns. As WCPT President Marilyn Moffat said: "World Physical Therapy Day is an opportunity to say what we do, how we do it, why we do it, and why physical therapists are the movement, physical activity, and exercise experts."

You can read more about World Physical Therapy Day activities at <http://www.wcpt.org/wptday>.

WCPT has also been involved in promoting the professions, vital role in disease prevention through other channels. For example, the Confederation was represented at a World Health Organization meeting on preventing childhood obesity in Geneva in December 2009. This brought together health professionals, academics and government officials as a first step in developing recommendations on population-based strategies to prevent childhood obesity. WCPT representative Anders Raustorp from the Swedish Association of Registered Physiotherapists, emphasised at the meetings that physical activity, and not just diet, was a fundamental factor for weight control.

Addressing workforce issues

WCPT joined with the International Council of Nurses, the International Hospital Federation, the International Pharmaceutical Federation, the World Dental Federation, the World Medical Association, the World Health Organisation and the Global Health Workforce Alliance to launch a new campaign for good working conditions (positive practice environments) for healthcare workers and their patients.

The Positive Practice Environments (PPE) Campaign (www.ppecampaign.org) responds to evidence that current workforce shortages and poor working conditions, pay and health and safety are adversely affecting recruitment and retention of health professionals, the performance of health facilities and patient outcomes. The campaign aims to raise awareness about the importance of the environment in which health professionals practise, and how it can affect recruitment and retention of health professionals. As part of the campaign, WCPT released a joint statement with the international bodies representing doctors, nurses, pharmacists and dentists.

Physical therapists and WCPT representatives also played an important part in the First Global Forum on Human Resources for Health, organised by the Global Health Workforce Alliance, and held in 2008 in Kampala, Uganda. It was a response to the global crisis in human resources for health – an acute global shortage and migration of healthcare professionals, unfavourable and challenging working conditions, inequalities in access to basic health needs and new killer diseases. WCPT Vice President Zola Danile presented a paper on the importance of incentives for retaining health professionals.

“In the face of such issues, there are often calls for a new type of health workforce. We want to support member organisations to ensure that physical therapists are an intrinsic part of any realignment,” said Brenda Myers, WCPT Secretary General.

WCPT has also compiled a new policy statement on occupational health and safety of physical therapists.

Compiling information about world physical therapy

Major new projects have reinforced WCPT’s role as a focal point for collecting and disseminating information about the profession internationally.

The Confederation has started a project to collect data that provides a snapshot of physical therapy around the world, and is contacting all its member organisations requesting information about the practice, education and regulation of the profession in their country. Having this “common data set” easily available will help WCPT represent the profession internationally, provide support to its member organisations, and provide vital information to organisations like the World Health Organization.

Following a resolution at the 2007 General Meeting, WCPT has also compiled a global listing of physical therapy entry-level education programmes that are recognised by member organisations. This is available via the WCPT website.

A survey in 2008 designed to gather information for the 2011 WCPT Congress provided a useful snapshot of what concerned physical therapists globally. More than



Top image: The congress of WCPT's South America Region was held in Santiago, Chile, in August 2010. From left to right: Brenda Myers, WCPT Secretary General; Maritza Pecarevic from Chile; David Lopez, Chairman of the WCPT South America Region; Marilyn Moffat, WCPT President; Lesley Bainbridge from Canada; Margaret Grant from Australia.



Top image: WCPT Executive Committee members (from left) Mabel Yvonne Espinel Gonzalez (South America), Sylvia Kambalometore (Africa) and Sandra Thornhill (North America Caribbean) during a meeting in London in 2009.



Left image: Students from the first ever qualifying education programme for physical therapists in Malawi, which started in 2010 after 17 years of planning.



Top image: Members of the Association of Physiotherapists of Serbia demonstrated exercises for children and adults in “Movement for Health” events held in Belgrade, Novi Sad and Nis in 2010.

Right image: British physical therapist David Young provides rehabilitation to a survivor of the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 – one of dozens of physical therapists who flew into the area to help in the aftermath. Picture: CBM www.cbmuk.org.uk



Left image: Swedish physical therapists demonstrate the benefits of movement for health during World Physical Therapy Day in 2010. Using materials provided by WCPT, member organisations around the world have highlighted the role of physical therapy in preventing and treating non-communicable disease.

1200 physical therapists and organisations from around the world completed the questionnaire, and said that the ageing society, new roles for physical therapists and health promotion stood out as challenges for the profession over the next five years.

Developing new educational alliances

WCPT is now the conduit through which physical therapists globally can access a range of resources for continuing professional development. It has embarked on new partnerships with the joint objective of making new resources widely available, and bringing in revenue to the Confederation.

In 2009 WCPT formed a partnership with the online education company Educata to provide a global web-based continuing education option for physical therapists (www.wcpt.org/node/29540). Educata offers a broad spectrum of courses covering areas as diverse as orthopaedics, cardiovascular/pulmonary, geriatrics and oncology.

As part of its commitment to expand opportunities for physical therapists to enhance their skills whatever their global location, it has also entered into a partnership with the American Physical Therapy Association and the company RehabEssentials to offer affordable, practical, and career-enhancing continuing education courses via CDs. WCPT will continue to look for opportunities to provide high quality continuing professional programmes to physical therapists.

Supporting physical therapists in areas in need

WCPT has supported the efforts of physical therapists who have been trying to help and rehabilitate people in countries affected by lack of health care, conflict or natural disasters. The years 2010 and 2011 saw a series of natural disasters affecting China, Haiti, Chile, New Zealand, Japan, Australia, Brazil, South Africa, Pakistan and Sri Lanka and physical therapists were involved in relief efforts in all of them.

The Confederation has provided support by publicising appeals, providing information, providing media coverage and entering into dialogue with individuals concerned. A section on the WCPT website provides a wide range of resources on disaster management.

Creating a repository of physical therapy expertise

In 2010 WCPT launched a completely new global service for sharing expertise, putting together people and organisations that need help with physical therapists who are experts in their field. It now has a database of physical therapists (www.wcpt.org/experts) prepared to offer their services to help the profession develop internationally. WCPT can match requests for support from member organisations and other institutions – whether it be in the fields of education, practice, research or policy – with the best person to help.

“Like much of WCPT’s work including the website and the common data project which is under development, this project is fundamental to the aims of WCPT because it is about sharing resources for the development of the profession,” says WCPT Secretary General Brenda Myers.

Making statements on world health issues

WCPT has set out its position on a range of international issues through new policy statements and guidelines.

In a new position statement, due to be adopted at the 2011 General Meeting, WCPT has stated its opposition to the use of landmines, nuclear, chemical and biological agents, and other weapons of armed violence. WCPT encourages member organisations and their members to work towards the elimination of landmines, nuclear, chemical, biological and other weapons of armed violence.

The Confederation has also produced new endorsements setting out its support for: the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Recognising the contribution of physical therapists

The WCPT Awards, launched at the General Meeting in Vancouver in 2007, have recognised the international leadership and service of individual physical therapists across WCPT regions, subgroups and member organisations. More awards are to be presented at the congress in Amsterdam in 2011.

WCPT AWARD WINNERS 2011

International Service Award

Gwendolen Jull
Olwen Finlay
Prudence Galley
Elizabeth Carrington
Ina Diener
Amélia Pasqual Marques
Yoriko Taguchi
Paul JM Helders
Jill Boissonnault
Joyce Mothabeng
Antonio Lopes Fernandes
Eckhardt Boehle
Ann Moore
Elisabeth Haase

Humanitarian Service Award

Peta Ann Schmidt

WCPT AWARD WINNERS 2007

International Service Award

Seyi Ladele Amosun
Pedro Mancilla Fritis
Robin McKenzie
Brian Mulligan
Isao Nara
Nancy Prickett
Amanda Squires

Humanitarian Service Award

Alberto Cairo

Part 2: *Achievement in the past 60 years*

“Being a member of the global organisation WCPT has provided us with inspiration and support over the years. WCPT membership has been a driving force for our development into a profession.”

Birgit Rösblad, Legitimerade Sjukgymnasters Riksförbund (one of WCPT's 11 founder organisations)

It's hard to believe that, before the second half of the 20th century, though physical therapists were part of national families, they were not part of a global one. In the early 50s, World War had divided nations and peoples, and the damage wreaked to economies and infrastructure made the challenge of making links between like-minded people in different countries all the more daunting.

But for physical therapists, all that changed with the establishment of WCPT in 1951. Sixty years later, there is an opportunity to look back at how far the global family has come, but also at some of the fundamental values and priorities that have always stayed the same. WCPT's first President, Mildred Elson from the United States, was well aware that setting up a global body to represent physical therapy across the world was an ambitious project. But in a world ravaged by disability caused by war and disease, the need was urgent.

"The magnitude of the political, socio-economic and health problems could hardly be recognised by the average citizen then any more than now," she recalled in 1983. "It was recognised universally, however, that if peace and stability were to be attained, all must work a share to alleviate these problems."

Representatives from 15 countries gathered in London in 1948 to investigate the possibility of setting up an international organisation to give guidance to the profession, the United Nations, specialised agencies and international voluntary organisations sponsoring rehabilitation programmes.

"Discussions with leaders of other organisations convinced us that there was no alternative to an international physical therapy organisation," said Mildred Elson. The inaugural meeting of WCPT took place on 8th September, 1951 in Copenhagen, Denmark. National representatives discussed how they might help physical therapists promote the interchange of professional and scientific knowledge, create closer links between the profession in different countries and provide on an international level many of the services that professional associations offered at national level.

These have been priorities for the Confederation ever since.

Bringing physical therapists together

From 1951, the Confederation has consolidated its role as the profession's global body by continually providing new means to bind together the profession, providing it with stability and strength.

For example, it has brought together the global experiences of the profession into a common language. In 1963, WCPT produced its first glossary of terms commonly used by physical therapists. By 1999, it had agreed a comprehensive description of physical therapy. And work on this international language continues, with WCPT about to launch a new glossary of terms in 2011.

Representing small and large alike

When WCPT was first formed, it had 11 members. The number of member organisations has grown consistently, with particular growth in the 1970s and 1990s, and at the 2007 General Meeting WCPT admitted its 100th member. The growth reflects the way in which WCPT now represents physical therapy not just in the major developed countries, but in smaller countries, or countries where the profession is small, struggling to find a foothold, and needs the support of a global family.

WCPT has changed its democratic procedures over the years to allow the voice of the profession in smaller countries, as well as larger ones, to be heard. In the 1980s, one member one vote principles were incorporated into the Confederation's articles.

WCPT has supported member organisations on an individual basis, and also through larger groupings and initiatives. In 1991, WCPT established five regions, to bring potentially disparate parts of the Confederation together, and give member organisations the opportunity to discuss issues of common relevance at regional level at conferences, events and meetings.

Regions have encouraged the involvement of physical therapists from countries not currently represented in WCPT – for example, providing partnerships with well established member organisations and advising them on the best means to meet internationally accepted standards.

Where the world of physical therapy meets

WCPT held its first international congress in London in 1953. It was, according to the then Vice President, Rudie Agersnap, “well organised and in fine British style”. Since then, WCPT has held 14 congresses, and the 16th is to be held in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, in 2011.

After many years of host member organisations taking responsibility for the congress, the event was brought under the control of the WCPT Secretariat before the 2003 congress. An International Scientific Committee was established, to raise standards and ensure the programme was world class. There were almost 3,000 abstract submissions for 2011 – a 30% rise on 2007.

WCPT congresses are special, and thousands attend knowing the value of connecting internationally with their colleagues from around the world. In the words of one physical therapist: “Congress helps to make the physio world a smaller place, helping us gain new ideas, enhance our skills set and share experiences.”

“WCPT has given our members the incentive to aspire to professional excellence and made us feel a part of a greater mainstream physical therapy family.”

Oksana Kunanec-Swarnyk of the Ukrainian Association of Physical Therapy

1951

WCPT founded

It was, and remains, the only organisation representing all physical therapists from every corner of the world.



Delegates at WCPT's inaugural meeting on the morning of 8th September 1951, in the Ingeniorhuset Restaurant, Copenhagen.

1956

Second WCPT Congress held in New York

This set a pattern of three to four-yearly events bringing together the world of physical therapy to learn and network.



Outgoing founding President Mildred Elson (left) is presented with a salver at the 1956 Congress in New York by incoming President Gwen Griffin (centre).

The profession's global communications hub

From its early days, when WCPT depended on one borrowed typewriter and a telephone, to today's information superhighways, WCPT has been the focal point of global information flow for the profession. Until the mid 1980s, when WCPT purchased its first computer, its fact-finding, information-gathering and information dissemination depended on meetings, personal visits, letters and phone conversations.

The advent of the internet and email changed things radically. But WCPT has always tried to bear in mind that reliability, speed and access to new communications technologies varies from country to country, and from location to location. And it has never lost sight of the fact that, in a global body, there would always be a vital place for face to face contact, and seeing things with your own eyes.

WCPT has published a newsletter since the 1960s, and it was its main means of communicating with member organisations until the late 1990s. In 1995 Brenda Myers, WCPT's newly installed Secretary General, said: "WCPT has the potential to be the focal point for a worldwide flow of physical therapy information, providing organisations with new experience and expertise." And the advent of the internet meant this was possible in ways never previously envisaged.

Regular and instant communication with member organisations began via email in 1996. A website was launched in 2001 and by 2002 it was identified as the primary vehicle by which WCPT could communicate with its member organisations, regions and subgroups, as well as the global physical therapy community. WCPT began to work differently as a result of the technology now available. For example, the International Scientific Committee that decided on the programme for the 2003, 2007 and 2011 congresses did not actually meet face-to-face until the event, but with online conferencing and emails managed to maintain a creative dialogue while making the best use of WCPT's resources.

Consultation with members by email and through the website became quicker and easier, and WCPT was better able to inform key projects with expertise from around the world, unrestrained by geography. Formal and informal online groups and networks were established, where physical therapists could network on professional areas of common interest – and of importance to the profession globally. Web-based forums on specialist subjects such as the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) and evidence based practice were set up, for example.

"The aim of joining WCPT was, and still is, our belief in the need to have a unifying international professional organisation, to have closer contacts with other societies, and above all to learn about the experiences of other countries."

Iranian Physiotherapy Association

1963

Physical therapy curriculum

Following factfinding around the world, WCPT publishes its first guidelines on the physical therapy curriculum, recommending 2700 hours training.



Miss Nielson, WCPT's first Secretary General, pictured during her tour of Asian countries in 1963.

1974

WCPT approves the principle of subgroups

The International Federation of Orthopaedic Manipulative Physical Therapists was the first to join, and there are now seven WCPT subgroups – important international physical therapy organisations in their own right which promote the advancement of physical therapy and the exchange of scientific knowledge in their field.



Two key figures in the development of manipulative therapy, and in the development of IFOMPT, Jeff Maitland (second left) and Freddy Kaltenborn (right) pictured with WCPT President AJ Fernando in 1992.

In 2009, WCPT relaunched its website, making it the organisation's central information and communication resource, with an accessible and user friendly interface. It achieved 53,000 page views within its first month, and reached a peak in February 2011 when it achieved 179,000 page views.

In the meantime, WCPT's long-lived news bulletin has continued to evolve. It became professionally produced and named "WCPT News" in 1995. In the 2000s, as news items could increasingly be communicated electronically and via a new WCPT E-Update, it focused more on looking at international issues in depth, providing interviews, analysis and features.

Efforts to gather information, as well as disseminate it, continue. In the first decade of the 21st century, WCPT embarked on a major project to collect information from member organisations about the state of physical therapy in as many countries as possible – building a unique global picture of numbers of physical therapists, how they are educated, and where they work. Member organisations and regions will be able to access this information for research, campaigning, and encouraging high standards of physical therapy education and practice.

Setting global standards in physical therapy

From its very beginning, setting world standards in physical therapy has been the cornerstone of WCPT – before its inception in 1951, nothing existed. Recalling the inception of WCPT in 1983, its founding President Mildred Elson said: "We were aware of the international trends and the pitfalls ahead if nothing was done. Worldwide standards were highly desirable, but were they attainable? We thought so, but it was going to be rough going."

For the past 60 years, WCPT has written, refined and updated international standards to guide the profession, support its development around the world, and help member organisations achieve national improvements. In 1959, it ratified its first set of ethical principles, which have been updated ever since. In 1991 it started publishing its declarations of principle and position statements, laying down a clear professional view on issues such as specialisation, educational level and use of support personnel.

As the 21st century dawned, WCPT developed new declarations of principle and position statements and updated existing ones to reflect changes in the profession and health services. In 2011, a new package of policy statements will be presented to the WCPT General Meeting, including re-edited versions of existing statements.

"The International Federation of Orthopaedic Manipulative Physical Therapists paved the way by being accepted as WCPT's first official subgroup in 1974. Since then it has enjoyed a very close and harmonious relationship with WCPT."

Barbara Hetherington, Former Vice President of IFOMPT

1988

WCPT pledges opposition to apartheid, and support for South African colleagues

The 1980s saw physical therapists in debate about how to best address the types of inequalities exemplified by apartheid in South Africa. They united behind professional colleagues through WCPT and jointly held ethical principles.



Delegates at the WCPT Special Meeting held in London in 1988, made necessary because the General Meeting in Sydney had been boycotted by some physical therapists in protest at apartheid.

1991

General Meeting in London agrees first declarations of principle and position statements

The statements have continued to lay down a clear professional view on issues such as specialisation, educational level, use of support personnel and autonomy.



Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom is introduced to delegates at the 1991 WCPT Congress in London.

However, it isn't just through documents that WCPT has encouraged the highest standards of physical therapist practice globally. It has encouraged the international development of expertise in specialist areas of physical therapy. In 1978, its first official subgroup was approved, and now there are seven, encouraging the highest standards of practice internationally in the fields of orthopaedic manipulative physical therapy, women's health, older people, acupuncture, private practice (EBP), sports physical therapy and paediatrics.

It has continually advocated for evidence based practice, and in 2001, it held a landmark meeting on EBP in London.

Often its standard-setting work has taken considerable effort by physical therapists around the world. In 1996, WCPT set three task forces in motion to develop an internationally agreed description of physical therapy, examine quality assurance issues, and investigate issues in international recruitment and education. The work resulted in a new WCPT declaration on regulation and reciprocity, a new project to gather information on education programmes and a new description of physical therapy – which has since become a standard text for the profession.

WCPT has put much of its standard-setting work on a very practical basis, by publishing international guidelines for physical therapists. Early guidelines were those on specialisation, adopted in 1982. It now has guidelines on physical therapist professional entry level qualification, record keeping, physical therapy across the lifespan and standards of physical therapist practice – with more to follow.

One professional voice for global health

Since its inception WCPT has provided one united voice speaking out for the profession globally. This has sometimes involved speaking out alone, other times it has involved entering into consultations or joint projects with other global bodies, and sometimes WCPT has joined full collaborations with other bodies to make its voice stronger.

WCPT began official relations with the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1952, and gained consultative status with UNICEF in 1958. Ever since it has entered into collaborative work programmes with these organisations, other United Nations bodies, not for profit organisations and other world professional bodies with the aim of improving world health.

In the 1960s, WCPT notably provided support to international relief efforts and projects to develop rehabilitation, providing WHO with details of physical therapists interested in taking posts in developing countries. In 1961 it was represented at major meetings organised by WHO, UNICEF and the International Union for Child Welfare.

It became particularly active in putting the case for physical therapy in the 1980s when it argued against WHO proposals to introduce multi-purpose rehabilitation therapists. In the second half of the decade, it collaborated with WHO on projects on physical therapy and care of the elderly and community based rehabilitation, jointly reporting on the role of physical therapy in the care of elderly people in 1989.

2007

WCPT General Meeting admits its 100th member organisation

There were just 11 member organisations at the first General Meeting in 1951.



The Bahamas Association of Physiotherapists was one of ten new member organisations admitted to WCPT in 2007.

2009

WCPT relaunches its website, first started in 2002, and gets 62,000 page views a month within one year

WCPT has become the central information exchange hub for the profession globally.



WCPT President Marilyn Moffat presses the button to launch the new WCPT website at a reception in London in April 2009.

This work continued into the 1990s when WCPT held an expert meeting on ageing with the International Institute of Ageing in Malta, and published a report on the meeting in 1993.

In 1997 WCPT published guides for rehabilitation workers with WHO and the World Federation of Occupational Therapists. The 1990s also saw substantial collaboration with the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims on various projects involving physical therapists.

It is part of WCPT's long-term plan to raise the profile of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) and work with WHO on a collaborative programme to gain greater use of ICF by physical therapists. The ICF is becoming a living part of physical therapy services around the world, providing a basis for delivering more effective services. WCPT is also collaborating with WHO on other classifications of disease and interventions.

For many years, WCPT has been concerned about the way in which, in some countries, shortages of health workers and migration issues have endangered major initiatives to tackle the causes of global ill health. WCPT is collaborating with other international professional bodies to investigate the poor working conditions experienced by the profession in many countries, and the influence this may have on workforce levels.

In its latest collaboration, WCPT has joined with the international professional bodies of physicians, nurses, dentists and pharmacists in the World Health Professions Alliance to make its voice and influence felt more widely – among other professions as well policy makers and the public.

Supporting member organisations

WCPT is a confederation of members. Without its member organisations, WCPT would not exist, and it is a fundamental objective of the organisation to support its members as they try to attain the best national physical therapy services that they can for patients. For many member organisations, the resources and day to day support provided by WCPT have been instrumental in their attempts to gain expert knowledge, professional status, and high quality professional education in their countries.

“We have been delighted to welcome WCPT to the World Health Professions Alliance, and I look forward to working together. The profession, and its global body, have significantly grown in standing over recent years, and alongside other health professions has an invaluable contribution to make on influencing world health.”

Wonchat Subhachaturas, President of the World Medical Association

Spreading professional expertise

Through events, publications and services, WCPT has attempted to ease the flow of information and expertise towards those countries that need it most.

WCPT has access to some of the top names in physical therapy research and practice around the world, and it has tried to make the most of these. In the 1980s and 90s, for example, a series of meetings and publications harnessed physical therapy expertise in ageing, and disseminated that knowledge. In the first decade of the 21st century, it published agenda-setting discussion papers on community based rehabilitation, evidence based practice and the ICF, and started online forums on these areas. And in 2011, WCPT launched its experts database, putting experts in touch with member organisations needing support.

Supporting recognition of the profession

WCPT has continually supported the status of physical therapists as independent and valued practitioners around the world.

In 1982, the WCPT Code of Ethics was changed, to allow for patients to be treated without referral from a medical doctor. This document recognised the increasingly independent nature of the profession. With this document, and others setting down principles and standards for an autonomous profession, WCPT has provided tools for member organisations to negotiate with governments and other bodies.

WCPT representatives have provided support to member organisations striving to improve the status of physical therapy in their country, sometimes even entering into direct negotiations with officials.

Often the support is less direct, but equally powerful. Through providing campaigns advice and material, and through promoting events such as World Physical Therapy Day, WCPT provides member organisations with means to raise the profile of the profession in their own country, and drive home their points to the public and policy makers.

“The growth in every aspect of WCPT is phenomenal. It is a truly democratic global organisation, and today acts as a central world focus for physical therapy. Two important happenings stand out from my own time. The official establishment of special interest groups in Sydney in 1974, and in 1978, in Tel Aviv, the rescision of the article requiring physical therapists to practice on referral from a doctor.”

Doreen Moore-Wheelwright
WCPT President 1970-74

WINNERS OF THE MILDRED ELSON AWARD

Established with funds from the American Physical Therapy Association, this is an award for an outstanding contribution to international leadership in physical therapy.

Mildred Elson (1987)

Elizabeth McKay (1991)

Geoffrey Maitland (1995)

Joan Walker (1999)

Marilyn Moffat (2003)

Jules Rothstein (2007)

Stanley Paris (2011)

Developing education and qualification

Since its establishment, WCPT has aimed to support countries wishing to develop physical therapy education programmes. In 1958, President Griffin spoke of the need for an agreed basic syllabus around the world. “World reciprocity is desired and must be the ultimate goal of the WCPT.” While world reciprocity may still be a dream, WCPT has brought it closer with guidelines that are being followed around the world.

Since the 1950s, WCPT has continually developed and updated guidelines on physical therapy education. In 1963, following factfinding around the world, WCPT published its first guidelines on the physical therapy curriculum, recommending 2700 hours training. In the mid to late 60s, it organised with WHO courses for physical therapy teachers in Britain and Mexico.

In the 1970s, it supported member organisations as degree courses were increasingly adopted, and professional training became professional education. Over the decades that followed, WCPT guidance and policy were updated to reflect that change.

Now, WCPT has established a network of experts and a range of resources to support organisations looking to establish new physical therapist education programmes and set the profession on a stronger footing in their country. Definitive statements on what should be included in the curriculum of entry-level physical therapist programmes have been set down, and WCPT provides a means by which courses can be reviewed and judged to meet WCPT standards.

Working for and with people with disabilities

Since its beginnings in the 1950s, a time when the world was still plagued by polio, WCPT has supported physical therapists in their work with people with disabilities. As the years have passed, so there has also been an increasing emphasis on supporting the rights and wishes of people with disabilities, and working with them to achieve their goals.

The International Year of Disabled People in 1981 saw international understanding about the needs of people with disabilities begin to grow, and WCPT supported many initiatives from its member organisations. In the 1990s, physical therapists played a central role in the new international classifications of disability and sport for disabled people.

WCPT has been an important contributor along with other professional and non-governmental organisations, to the World Report on Disability. Physical therapists were involved in reviewing the report. The WCPT Executive Committee has prepared an endorsement of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which ensures full and equal human rights and freedoms for all persons with disabilities, and promotes respect for their dignity. This will be presented to the WCPT General Meeting in Amsterdam.

As another landmark in WCPT’s history passes, the Confederation looks back with pride at what has been done, and ahead with determination to do much, much more.



Delegates from Africa Region and Turkey gather during the WCPT Congress in Vancouver in 2007.

“When WCPT was 50 years old, we reflected upon how far we had come as a profession since the beginning – toddling back to the place in Denmark where WCPT was first constituted, seeing how the profession had changed over that time. Regionalisation was more successful than ever dreamed of, and during my presidency, the growth of membership, particularly in Middle East, stands out.”

Sandra Mercer Moore, WCPT President 1999-2007

WCPT PRESIDENTS

Mildred Elson	1953-1956
Gwen Griffin	1956-1959
Rudie Agersnap	1959-1967
Glen Park	1967-1970
Doreen Moore	1970-1974
Eugene Michels	1974-1982
Margrit List	1982-1988
Brian Davey	1988-1991
A J Fernando	1991-1995
David Teager	1995-1999
Sandra Mercer Moore	1999-2007
Marilyn Moffat	2007

FOUNDING MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

Australian Physiotherapy Association
Canadian Physiotherapy Association
Den alm. Danske Massageforening (Denmark)
Finlands Medikalgygymnasters Forening (Finland)
Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (Great Britain)
New Zealand Society of Physiotherapists
Norske Sykegygymnasters Landsforbund (Norway)
South African Society of Physiotherapists
Kvinnliga Legitimerade Sjukgygymnasters Riksforbund (Sweden)
American Physical Therapy Association
Zentralverband der Krankengymnastischen Landesverbande im Westdeutschen Bundesgebiet (Western Germany)

World Confederation for Physical Therapy

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