



WCPT: the first 50 years



Moving physical therapy forward

About this publication...

This review has been compiled using selected resources to reflect some of the issues, achievements and colour of the WCPT over the past 50 years. It is necessarily selective, and aims to provide a perspective on some of the events which shaped the Confederation's work and development rather than a comprehensive and detailed history.



WCPT's first and second Presidents, Miss Elson (*right*) and Miss Griffin, pictured at the third WCPT General Meeting in New York, 1956.

Pictured on front cover: (*top left*) the audience at the WCPT's inaugural meeting in 1951, and (*lower right*) Joan Walker, winner of the Mildred Elson Award, addresses the audience at the opening ceremony of the 1999 WCPT Congress in Yokohama, Japan.

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Beginnings

Physical therapy in the 20th century



While the idea of using physical means to heal and restore body function has developed over thousands of years, the recognition of a discrete body of skills and knowledge known as physical therapy only occurred in the 20th century. The use of exercise, hydrotherapy, electricity, heat, light and massage were systematically developed. Physical treatments in general gained medical recognition and public favour, and many practitioners were quick to recognise the opportunity to combine various modalities into treatment programmes.

Prompted by the need for legitimacy, many like-minded practitioners began to form groups and societies to share knowledge and skills, validate techniques, identify standards, offer examinations and register those appropriately qualified to offer specialist services to the public within agreed codes of conduct.

Two world wars resulted in an unprecedented number of casualties on all sides. Physical therapy played an important part in the huge advances made in the medical and orthopaedic management of traumatic injuries. The effectiveness of physical therapy to restore functional loss was clear, and the concept of rehabilitation was extended to include other therapeutic activities such as sport.

From those beginnings, the constituent member organisations of physical therapists that now make up WCPT each advanced along their own pathways of professional development. And as these organisations developed, so too did professional exchange across national borders.

Why was WCPT formed?

Mildred Elson, founding President of WCPT, provided a concise description of the main force behind WCPT's formation. She said: "In 1948, when the Confederation was first discussed at a meeting in London, called by the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, the world was just emerging from the ravaging effects of World War II. The magnitude of the political, socio-economic and health problems could hardly be recognised by the average citizen then any more than now. It was recognised universally, however, that if peace and stability were to be attained, all must work a share to alleviate these problems."

Twenty years before WCPT was formed, physiotherapists were taking part in study tours and conferences overseas: the International Congress of Massage in Paris

in 1937, for example. World War II and the ensuing shortage of resources put paid to such events for some time, but there was a post-war surge of collective interest in professional arrangements overseas. There was a general desire to learn from experience of war and forge or re-establish links which had been weakened during that time. Several international organisations were established, notably the World Health Organization in 1948.

A dialogue between Britain and the United States was instrumental in WCPT's formation. Mildred Elson recalled in 1983: "Right after the War, on the first voyage of the Queen Elizabeth, was an important visitor to the American Physical Therapy Association: Miss M J Neilson, Honorary Secretary of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP). This was the beginning of a most rewarding friendship and professional relationship. We both were aware of the international trends and the pitfalls ahead if nothing was done. World-wide standards were highly desirable, but were they attainable? We thought so, but it was going to be rough going. Discussions with leaders of other organisations concerned with the physically handicapped convinced us that there was no alternative to an international physical therapy organisation."

In 1948, the CSP invited international participation in their annual Congress, and 120 physical therapists representing organisations from 15 countries attended. Representatives from 13 countries (Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Holland, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, USA) held a meeting to discuss international collaboration. They decided there was a need for an international organisation to give guidance to the profession, to the United Nations and its specialised agencies, and to international voluntary organisations sponsoring rehabilitation programmes. A provisional committee was set up, and this met again in Paris in 1950. It resolved to set up an international body to represent physiotherapists and to hold an inaugural meeting.

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) permitted the Confederation to use its address and typewriter, and the American Physical Therapy Association's attorney checked the articles of association. Miss Neilson from the CSP agreed to undertake the duties of honorary treasurer for the time being.

The 1950s

The inauguration of WCPT

“The future must be a period devoted to constructive work and progressive activities. It is hoped that all Member Organisations will play a vital part in the world confederation.”

M J Neilson, Treasurer and Secretary General

WCPT officially came into being at its inaugural meeting on Saturday September 8th 1951 at the Ingeniørhuset Restaurant in Copenhagen, Denmark at 10am. There were 11 inaugural associations, delegates from 14 countries and 120 physical therapists attending as observers.

Mildred Elson recalled in 1983: “I can still feel the excitement of that day in Copenhagen. The associations who could not meet standards were of course disappointed, but somehow a feeling of friendship remained among all the associations present.”

Representatives discussed the merits of establishing an organisation which would help physiotherapists promote the interchange of professional and scientific knowledge, make better and closer links between countries and within the profession itself, and provide on an international scale many of the services that professional associations offered at national level. The annual subscription was set at £8 sterling.

Setting the tone for WCPT's work

According to Rudie Agersnap, then third Vice President and future WCPT President, the first Congress in London in 1953 was “magnificent, well planned and well organised in fine British style.”

She recorded her impressions of the second general meeting, which was attended by 25 nations: “The General Meeting was formal, familiar to some of the delegates, unfamiliar to some, for instance me... Miss Elson chaired the meeting to perfection. We, the voting delegates were maybe a bit frustrated and were absolutely not as active as we were supposed to be, and Miss Elson wanted some response from us. I can still see her pointing at me and saying ‘Miss Agersnap, do you have any comments to the proposed resolution?’”

Mildred Elson, WCPT's inaugural President, set the tone for WCPT's activity at the London General Meeting. “Our financial resources are small,” she said, “but our combined professional



Outgoing President Mildred Elson (left) is presented with a salver at the 1956 Congress in New York by incoming President Miss Griffin (centre) and Second Vice President Sybil Coleridge (Sweden)

1951

WCPT inaugurated in the Ingeniørhuset Restaurant, Copenhagen, Denmark.

First warning that smoking is linked to cancer, in the Readers Digest.

1952

WCPT initiates formal relationship with the World Health Organisation (WHO).

IBM produces its first computer in New York.

1953

First WCPT World Congress, London.

Second General Meeting agrees that emblem used on Congress programme should be adopted as the official emblem of WCPT.

Accounts for year ended 31st December 1953 show a bank balance of £580.

Watson and Crick define DNA.

1954

WCPT represented at the Third International Poliomyelitis Conference in Rome, where Dr Jonas E Salk and Dr Albert B Sabin speak of their experiments with vaccines.

Hydrogen bomb exploded at Bikini.

GA/1/10/51

WORLD CONFEDERATION FOR PHYSICAL THERAPY

MINUTES of the Inaugural Meeting of the World Confederation for Physical Therapy held in the Ingeniorhuset Restaurant, Copenhagen, at 10 a.m., on Saturday, September 8th, 1951.

THE FOLLOWING DELEGATES WERE PRESENT:

Miss M. Elson (in the chair)	U.S.A.	American Physical Therapy Association
Miss M.D. Verco	Australia	Australian Physiotherapy Association
Mlle A. Penalosa	Belgium	Fédération Belge des Kinésistes
Miss M. Spence	Canada	Canadian Physiotherapy Association
Mrs. R. Agersnap	Denmark	Den Almindelige Danske Massageforening
Miss A. Wilskman	Finland	Suomen Lääkintövoimistelijain Yhdistys r.y. Finlands Medikalgymnasters

Monsieur André Nicolle



The minutes from the inaugural meeting (top); and (left) some of the delegates assembled for the inaugural meeting. Below, Mildred Elson (right) consults on the podium with the Confederation's lawyer Mr P Federspiel; at the table below sit Miss Neilson (centre), a translator and a secretary

and spiritual resources are great. Thus the profession is strengthened in every country by being a member of a distinguished and honorable family, the World Confederation. Our Confederation is just two years old – we are only just beginning to stand firmly and confidently face our future. That future depends not on a few, but on every physical therapist, through his work with patients, through his participation in the activities and business of his association, and through working with professional colleagues and private individuals devoted to our common goal – the recovery of the patient, physically, socially and economically.”

It was agreed that the hexagonal emblem used on the Congress programme should be adopted

as the official emblem of WCPT. Accounts for year ended 31st December 1953 show a total income of £641 and a bank balance of £580.

The early secretariat

For the first ten years of its existence, the Confederation depended on the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy to provide it with secretarial services. At that time, WCPT did not have a separate headquarters or a regular source of income. Elizabeth McKay, WCPT Secretary General (1970-86) said: “But for the very real support of the CSP in those early days, it is unlikely that WCPT would have attained a secure base at so early a stage or the stability which has enabled it to develop.”

Presidents during the 50s

- Miss M Elson (US) 1951-1956
- Miss G V Griffin (Great Britain) 1956-59
- Mrs R Agersnap (Denmark) 1959-65

The inaugural delegates

Those representing their national physical therapy organisations (as listed in official minutes) at the inaugural meeting were:

- Miss M Elson, USA
- Miss M D Verco, Australia
- Mlle A Penalosa, Belgium
- Miss M Spence, Canada
- Mrs R Agersnap, Denmark
- Miss A Wilskman, Finland
- Monsieur André Nicolle, France
- Miss W M McAllister, Great Britain
- Mr N A Val Oosten, Holland
- Miss P M H Andrews, New Zealand
- Mrs F Nørbech, Norway
- Mrs S Coleridge, Sweden
- Mlle Léonie Schmit, Luxembourg
- Miss M Worthingham, USA
- Miss G Finke, West Germany

Also present were:

- Miss M J Neilson (Convenor), Great Britain
 - Mrs J Boddington (in attendance), Great Britain
 - Miss I Koppel, interpreter
- 120 physical therapists from various countries attending as observers.

1955
Official relationship with the World Health Organisation begins.

Salk polio vaccine introduced.

1956
Second Congress and Third General Meeting held in New York.

Bobaths' first tour of the US.
Treaty establishing the European Economic Community comes into force.

1957
Launch of Sputnik 1, the first earth-orbiting satellite.

1958
WCPT gains consultative status with UNICEF.

1959
WCPT President Griffin completes her world tour of 18 countries.

Fourth General Meeting and Third Congress held in Paris, France.

Draft ethical principles for physical therapists ratified.

The 1950s

“Our financial resources are small, but our combined professional and spiritual resources are great.”

Mildred Elson,
President



Pictured at the 1956 Congress dinner in New York, left to right: Miss Marjorie Spence (Canada), Miss S Coleridge, Mr. M.J Dupuis-Deltor (France, Third Vice President), Miss Neilson, and two delegates

Gaining recognition

The first decade of its existence was a time for the Confederation to create a global profile, particularly among official bodies. WCPT made contact with the United Nations and its agencies, and made a formal application for recognition. Wherever possible, the confederation was represented at international conferences.

In 1954, Mildred Elson told the Sixth World Congress of the International Society for the Welfare of Cripples: “I am very proud of physical therapists for their willingness to learn, to share and to cooperate with their fellow

citizens and other workers in providing greater service to the handicapped. We are too few but there will be more, there must be more, to do the job.” There were no travelling expenses in the budget, so either local representatives attended or those who could get financial support from their own organisation.

In 1956, WCPT Honorary Secretary M.J. Neilson discussed with World Health Organization representatives the difficulties of recruiting physical therapists for world health assignments. “Very often WHO cannot find sufficient physical therapists to fill important vacancies in countries wishing to establish physical therapy programmes,” she reported.



The oath and the globe

Two features of WCPT Congresses seem to have become lost in the mists of time. WCPT reports record that at the start of the WCPT Congress in London in 1953, the British Health Minister Iain MacLeod set in motion a

revolving lighted globe, which stayed in motion until the end of the Congress. It was agreed that this symbol of the Congress should be used at all future Congresses, together with a verse which was spoken during the opening ceremony which “exemplified so

well the spirit on which the World Confederation based its aims.”

The globe was pictured at the Melbourne Congress in 1967 (left), and mentioned by Glen Park in a report recalling her presidency. She recalled the lighting of

the globe at the Copenhagen conference in 1963, and how her last duty as President in Amsterdam in 1970 had been to “extinguish the light behind the globe which symbolises unity of physical therapists around the world”.





Rudie Agersnap (*third left*) with delegates from the third Congress in Paris, 1959



Following her world tour, WCPT President Griffin spoke in 1958 of the need for an agreed basic syllabus for the profession around the world. "World reciprocity is desired and must be the ultimate goal the WCPT," she said. "Such a solid world front is one of the best methods for overcoming the lack of knowledge of our work even today among groups of medical practitioners." She also first proposed regionalisation.

By the end of the decade, WCPT had successfully advertised the help and advice it could provide to health organisations around the globe. But the WCPT we know now was still a way off. In 1958, Second Vice President Agersnap warned that future plans for the Confederation depended on its financial status, and that even if the current annual subscription were doubled to £16 "providing our own Secretariat will be pure fantasy."

Jonas Salk (*right*) was honoured by WCPT at its New York Congress. With him are (*left to right*): Miriam Jacobs (US), G V M Griffin (President, UK), Mildred Elson (US) and Lucy Blair

Founder organisations

Australian Physiotherapy Association
 Canadian Physiotherapy Association
 Den alm. Danske Massageforening (Denmark)
 Finlands Medikalgyrnasters Förening
 The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (Great Britain)
 New Zealand Society of Physiotherapists
 Norske Sykegymnasters Landsforbund (Norway)
 South African Society of Physiotherapists
 Kvinnliga Legitimerade Sjukgymnasters Riksförbund (Sweden)
 American Physical Therapy Association
 Zentralverband der Krankengymnastischen Landesverbände im Westdeutschen Bundesgebiet (Western Germany)

Joining members

Organisations admitted to WCPT during the 1950s were:

1953

Comité National des Masseurs Kinésithérapeutes Français

1956

Fédération Nationale Belge des Kinésistes

National Association for Physiotherapy in Israel

Nederlands Genootschap voor Heilgymnastiek, Massage, en Physiotechniek

1959

Asociacion Colombiana de Fisioterapia



The 1960s

Setting the world standard

“The annual subscription from member organisations hardly covered the expenses for stamps and notepaper.”

Rudie Agersnap,
President

The 1960s and 70s were a time of consolidation for the Confederation, with a strong emphasis on standards setting, particularly in the field of education. WCPT had published guidelines on the physical therapy curriculum in its booklet “The Training of Physical Therapists” and in 1963 it re-drafted these to recommend 2,700 hours training. These should, it said, cover anatomy, physiology, pathology and clinical medicine, therapeutic exercise, massage, electrotherapy, clinical practice, psychology, departmental administration and professional responsibilities.

WCPT also recognised that real improvements in physical therapy services around the globe were unlikely until more countries had their own trained teachers. In co-operation with WHO, it organised two courses for teachers, one in Britain in 1965, and another in Spanish in the late 60s in Mexico.

Relief efforts by physical therapists

The 1960s also saw a major involvement by physical therapists in world relief efforts, and

projects to develop rehabilitation in developing countries, and WCPT was at the centre of these. WCPT could provide WHO with the names and nationalities of physical therapists interested in undertaking posts in developing countries, when a country asked for assistance.

In 1960, the World Health Organization assigned a team to assist the Moroccan Government in the disastrous paralysis outbreak caused by cooking oil contamination, which claimed over ten thousand victims. With the help of WCPT, the League of Red Cross Societies recruited physiotherapists to help. Among them was British physiotherapist Lois Dyer, who had attended early WCPT meetings as the South African representative.

She recalls: “I took out a team of eight. It was an incredible experience. It was only the poor who were affected, and the symptoms included dropped feet, dropped wrists, and about 10% got central neurological problems with spasticity, so there was a lot of work for physical therapists to do. When we got there it was chaos, with victims dotted all around the country. We had to organise five centres for them to go to, and set up muscle testing to find out how serious the situation was. Various other WCPT member countries also sent representatives.”

In 1960, WCPT secretary M J Neilson travelled to Morocco to visit physical therapists administering to victims. In her reports for the Executive Committee bulletin, she writes about her efforts to sort out satisfactory contracts for the physical therapists working in Morocco, and reports on the meeting of Red Cross societies in Geneva.

Such efforts were, like the formation of WCPT itself, an expression of increasing global action by physical therapists.

Expanding the physical therapy family

Throughout the decade, WCPT continued its efforts to embrace members of the profession around the globe, and bring together their



Confederation representatives pictured at a WCPT display at the Eighth World Congress of the International Society for the Welfare of Cripples in New York, 1960

1960

Plans announced for WCPT to have a paid secretary and its own Secretariat. European Confederation of Physical Therapy formed. Salk vaccine for polio reported to be 95% effective.

1961

M J Neilson appointed the first Secretary General. WCPT represented at major meetings organised by WHO, UNICEF, and the International Union for Child Welfare. General Secretary Neilson visits Egypt twice and, with

President Agersnap, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia.

First man in orbit around the earth, Major Yuri Gagarin. Wall erected between East and West Berlin.

1962

Office accommodation obtained rent free from the Royal National Pension Fund for Nurses in London. New octagonal WCPT emblem introduced. Miss Neilson visits Turkey and Greece.

1963

WCPT publishes a glossary of terms commonly used by physical therapists. WCPT General Meeting and Congress held in Copenhagen, Denmark. The annual subscription, until now the same for all Member Organisations,



WCPT Secretary General Neilson pictured during her tour of Asian countries in 1963

professional experiences into a common language. This found its most literal expression in 1963 when WCPT published a glossary of terms commonly used by physical therapists, in co-operation with the Terminology Unit of WHO and British, Canadian, Danish and South African physical therapists.

The chronology on these pages provides an indication of the extent of fact-finding and link-forging missions undertaken by WCPT Presidents and the Secretary General, Joyce Neilson over the decade. Rudie Agersnap recorded the value of these trips. "The response from many, many countries was spontaneous," she wrote. "Government departments, voluntary societies, doctors, physical therapists and others contacted WCPT, and requests for advice on planning and equipping schools and rehabilitation centres were numerous. So much so, that had it not been for the generosity of the CSP to provide secretarial help, it would have

been impossible to respond to the demands. In one of the many reports I have read about these activities, it was mentioned that the annual subscription from member organisations hardly covered the expenses for stamps and notepaper."



Delegates pay attention at the Melbourne Congress in 1967

Presidents during the 60s

Rudie Agersnap (Denmark), 1959-65

Glen Park (New Zealand) 1965-70 (pictured below)



Joining members

Organisations admitted or re-admitted to WCPT during the 1960s were:

1963

- Associação Brasileira de Fisioterapeutas
- Asociacion Guatemalteca de Fisioterapia
- Felag Islenskra Sjukrapjalfara
- Associação Portuguesa de Fisioterapeutas
- Fédération Suisse des Physiothérapeutes

1967

- Verband der Diplomierten Assistenten für Physikalische Medizin Österreichs
- Asociación de Kinesiólogos de Chile
- The Indian Association of Physiotherapists
- Nigerian Society of Physiotherapy
- Magistrow Wychowania Fizycznego Pracujacych W Rehabilitacji Polskie Towarzystwo Walki Z Kalectwem
- Asociación de Tecnicos en Fisioterapia del Uruguay

becomes payable on a per capita basis.

Miss Neilson visits Pakistan, Burma, Thailand, Hong Kong, Japan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Ceylon, India, UAR and Lebanon.

President John F Kennedy assassinated.

1964

The Beatles appear on the Ed Sullivan show.

Nelson Mandela jailed for life.

1965

Miss Neilson visits Latin America and Poland to report on standards of physical therapy services and training programmes.

1966

Miss Neilson visits Czechoslovakia to obtain information on training and working conditions for physical therapists.

1967

WCPT General Meeting and Congress held in Melbourne, Australia.

Christian Barnard performs first successful human heart transplant.

1968

Miss Neilson visits West African countries to survey rehabilitation services.

Epidural anaesthesia first used to ease childbirth pain.

1969

Neil Armstrong takes man's first step on the Moon.

The 1970s

Encouraging the worldwide contribution



“The era was the beginning of the really big expansion of WCPT. Today it has to be recognised that this is not an insignificant movement.”

Doreen Moore, President

The seventies saw several internal developments in WCPT, such as the adoption of its first Sub Groups. But much of its work was also in response to changes in the physical therapy profession itself – particularly the move towards education rather than training, and the increasing adoption of degree courses as the “gold standard” in education.

Linked to these developments, WCPT saw an increasing need to embrace all corners of the globe in developing an international agenda for physical therapy.

Doreen Moore, WCPT President from 1970 to 1974, recalls some of the abiding themes of the decade. “I think we started to think more globally. Up until then, WCPT had been largely an Anglo-European/American organisation, and we didn’t tend to have representatives from outside this jurisdiction. One reason we started to think more globally was that it became apparent that there were vast changes in physical therapy education ahead, especially if the Common Market in Europe and other trade agreements came into force. Also, physical therapy students from all over the world were now going to countries like England and the US, and there was a great deal more interplay with countries which up to this point had not developed their profession. So it was obvious that we had to make changes.”

“I did a great deal of travelling, and at that time there were very few funds for this. It wasn’t until



WCPT President Glen Park (second left) accompanies HRH Princess Margriet of the Netherlands, Patron of the Congress, as she arrives at the Amsterdam Congress in 1970

the Canadian conference in 1974 that it became part of Congress management that a certain amount of funding would go to WCPT. When I started as President, there was no funding for delegates to attend the General Meeting, so only physical therapists in an independent situation could afford to be involved in the world body. By the time I left, there was a proportion that were paid for.”

“We also amended WCPT’s constitution and changed voting procedures so that the large organisations didn’t seem to dominate so much. That meant that things could work more democratically. It was really a double handed process of both consolidating our position as a world organisation with organisations like WHO and trying to help those organisations in developing countries. We tried to make contact with as many people as possible, consult them, and help them to attain the standing that they needed.”

Doreen Moore’s successor, Eugene Michels, was also a team builder and motivator, and during his two terms as President encouraged the participation of smaller countries and tried to make them aware that their contributions were valued.



A first day cover issued to mark the WCPT Congress in Israel in 1978

1970

Elizabeth McKay becomes Secretary General of WCPT.

WCPT 8th General Meeting and 7th Congress held in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Articles of association are revised, allowing for the allocation of

votes based on the number of full-paying members in each Member Organisation.

World Confederation for Manual Therapy (later to become IFOMT) formed in Amsterdam by physical therapists from nine countries.

1971

WCPT publishes a manual for use by Member Organisations wishing to host a WCPT Congress.

Intel invent microprocessor.

1972

CT scanner first used to take cross sectional images of the human brain.

1974

WCPT Congress and General Meeting in Montreal, Canada. WCPT Sub Groups are approved in principle.

Scientists first prove that CFCs are destroying the earth’s ozone layer.

Nevertheless, at a time when WCPT was beginning to find its independence and confidence, member organisations received a stern rebuke from Secretary General Elizabeth McKay in her 1977 pre-conference report – for not responding to requests for information. “It does seem ironic that at a time when, with the move to new office accommodation, the Confederation is no longer dependent on others for accommodation, but able to stand alone, it is functioning less well than it should. In my last report I made the point that the Secretary-General was the entrepreneur and that the impetus for the continuance of the Confederation and its work had to come from you. I still hold to that opinion.”

However, Doreen Moore has no doubts that this was a positive time. “The era was the beginning of the really big expansion of WCPT. Today, bearing in mind the massive growth of the profession, it has to be recognised that this is not an insignificant movement.”



Miss Neilson on her retirement in 1970, and below her successor as Secretary General, Elizabeth McKay, pictured in 1972.



Presidents during the 70s

Doreen Moore (Canada) 1970-74 (*below right*)

Eugene Michels (US) 1974-82 (*below left*)



Joining members

Organisations admitted or re-admitted to WCPT during the 1970s were:

1970

- Fédération Française des Masseurs Kinésithérapeutes Rééducateurs
- Jamaica Physiotherapy Association
- Japanese Physical Therapy Association
- Asociacion Mexicana de Terapia Fisica y Rehabilitacion
- Pakistan Physiotherapy Society
- Philippines Physical Therapy Association
- Rhodesian Physiotherapy Association

1974

- Panhellenic Physical Therapy Association
- Korean Physical Therapy Association
- Malaysian Physiotherapy Association
- Pakistan Physiotherapy Society
- Magistrow Wychowania Fizycznego Pracujacych W Rehabilitacji Polskie Towarzystwo Walki Z Kalectwem
- Asociación Española de Fisioterapeutas
- Surinamese Vereniging voor Fysiotherapie
- Physical Therapy Association of Turkey

1978

- Egyptian Physical Therapy Association
- Hong Kong Physiotherapy Association
- Association Luxembourgeoise des Kinésithérapeutes Diplômés
- Physical Therapy Association of Thailand
- Asociacion Venezolana de Fisioterapeutas

WCPT was reported to represent 85,000 physical therapists through 42 member organisations in 1978



WCPT's 1974-8 Executive Committee pictured during a meeting at the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy in London

1975
Bill Gates founds Microsoft.

1977
Scientists report using bacteria in the lab to produce insulin.

1978
WCPT Congress and General Meeting in Tel Aviv, Israel.
IFOMT confirmed as a Sub Group.

John Paul II becomes Pope, after two of his predecessors die in the same year.

The World's first test-tube baby born.

The 1980s

Health for all

“If WCPT is seen throughout the world to be contributing to the extension of physical therapy education in those countries of need, the Confederation will experience growth and international acceptance.”

Brian Davey, President

“What is the profession of physical therapy going to look like in the year 2000AD?” asked a 1988 WCPT leaflet. It reflected one of the big focal points for health professionals’ activity in the 1980s: the World Health Organisation’s “Health for All by the Year 2000” campaign. In the hindsight of the new millennium, its idealism may seem unrealistic. But it was a big idea that proved a stimulus for change.

Decade of growth and maturation

The profession of physical therapy itself continued to grow, and this was reflected in the growth of the Confederation itself. President Eugene Michels flagged up the dilemma this posed for WCPT at the 1981 General Meeting. “The Confederation continues to grow, and should continue to grow, but that growth requires expenditure of money at the same time that it produces more income. For the Confederation, more so than for your own association, growth may increase expenditures more quickly than income.”

Increasing autonomy

A change to WCPT’s code of ethics marked the emergence of a mature and increasingly independent physical therapy profession. The change was initiated by an amendment to the Australian Physiotherapy Association’s own code of ethics which allowed for patients to be treated by physiotherapists without referral from a medical doctor. The APA proposed that WCPT’s code be changed to permit such practice within Member Organisations, and the change was adopted in 1982.



Margrit List (centre) takes legal advice during the Sydney meeting. Margaret O'Hare (right) looks on



Delegates assembled for the General Meeting that never was, in Sydney

Political turmoil

The 1980s saw one of the most problematic episodes in WCPT’s history, when Member Organisations’ differing opinions on how WCPT should respond to the apartheid regime in South Africa resulted in protracted legal wranglings and a postponed General Meeting. Two Member Organisations called for physical therapists to boycott the Sydney Congress in protest about the South African Society’s continuing membership of the WCPT, and one sought the expulsion of the association. This resulted in the Sydney Congress not receiving as many registrations as anticipated, and the General Meeting not having sufficient delegates present for it to make any decisions. Resolutions passed in Sydney had to be referred for ratification to a special meeting held a year later in London.

Delegates produced a statement regretting the fact that it had proved impossible “to prevent the intrusion of particular political matters originating in the governments and cultures of a number of countries”. Delegates expressed their “deepest disdain for laws and political systems that prohibit physiotherapists from practising according to the Code of Ethics.”

Some Member Organisations lodged complaints against others, and these were only resolved with legal help. But the episode was not without positive outcomes. According to Doreen Bauer, then the Australian delegate: “The problems became challenges and eventually WCPT prospered in ways that may not have occurred otherwise.”

1980

WCPT sets out the case against multi-purpose rehabilitation therapists, as proposed by the WHO.

WHO declares the end of smallpox, after mass vaccination programme launched 14 years ago.

John Lennon shot dead.

1981

WCPT member organisations launch initiatives for International Year of Disabled People.

AIDS first recognised.

1982

WCPT Congress and General Meeting in Stockholm, Sweden.

WCPT Development Fund initiated.

Amended ethical principles adopted.

European Confederation for Physical Therapy admitted as a Sub-Group.

Guidelines on specialisation adopted.

First artificial heart replacement.

Laser first used in cardiovascular surgery.

1986

Elizabeth McKay stands down as WCPT Secretary General and replaced by Margaret O'Hare.

Chernobyl nuclear reactor explodes, causing world's worst nuclear accident.

1987

2,300 people attend WCPT Congress in Sydney, Australia. General Meeting is inquorate, due to boycott.

Certainly, the South African association had an opportunity to make its anti-apartheid position clearer than ever before, and the fact that it had made great strides in equal opportunity despite the political regime. Years later, its submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was commended.

Increasing decentralisation

Moves begun in the 80s to make WCPT a more democratic body, responsive to the needs of all its members, found full fruition in the late 1980s. The official process of regionalisation began in 1988, when the Special Meeting in London agreed to regionalisation in principle and set up a task force to take the idea further. The European Member Organisations were the first to set up their Region, and held their inaugural meeting in Paris in 1990. By 1991, WCPT's existing five Regions were established.

The power balance in WCPT was also changed at the 1988 Special Meeting, with one member one vote principles being incorporated into the confederation's articles. Previously, votes were carried by member organisations according to the size of their membership. This effectively changed the power balance in WCPT, so that it could work more democratically.



Delegates at the Special Meeting at the North London School of Physiotherapy, the United Kingdom, in 1988



Ruth Wood, 2nd Vice President (left) and President Brian Davey (standing right) during a visit to African Member Organisations in 1989

Joining members

Organisations admitted or readmitted to WCPT during the 1980s were:

1982

- Physical Therapy Association of the Republic of China
- Iranian Physiotherapy Association
- Kenya Society of Physiotherapists
- Singapore Physiotherapy Association
- Zambia Society of Physiotherapy

1987/8

- Cyprus Association of Physiotherapists
- Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists
- Asociation Puertorriquena de Fisioterapia

In 1987, WCPT was reported as representing 142,000 physical therapists through 47 Member Organisations.

Presidents during the 80s



Eugene Michels (US) 1974-82

Margrit List (Germany) 1982-88 (above)

Brian Davey (Australia) 1988-91 (below)



1988

WCPT Special Meeting held at the North London School of Physical Therapy. Regionalisation policy adopted in principle, and task force set up.

Members pass resolutions appealing to all organisations to oppose apartheid, and pledging support for the South African society in their efforts to obtain equality in PT services.

1989

Change in WCPT articles to principle of one member one vote. WCPT co-operates with WHO on various projects on physiotherapy and care of the elderly and community based rehabilitation.

Report of WCPT's joint project with WHO on the role of physical therapy in the care of elderly people published.

Presidents Bush and Gorbachev declare the end of the Cold War. Berlin Wall is opened for first time in 28 years.

The 1990s

The decade of globalisation



“Our commonalties will continue to bind us together, and ensure that the work of WCPT is unique and essential”

Brenda Myers,
Secretary General

The 1990s was a decade where rehabilitation and disability took a higher global profile than ever before. Physical therapists associated with WCPT played a central role in initiatives such as an international classification of disability and sport for disabled people.

It was also a decade which witnessed an explosion in WCPT growth. Its new confidence as a global leader for the profession was marked by the development and publication of a set of principles and position statements which set clear ground as to where members of the profession stood as independent practitioners. The influence of Africa and Asia was also increasingly increasingly felt.

WCPT's declarations of principle were refined and published between 1991 and 1995. Making clear statements on issues such as specialisation, educational level and the use of support personnel, they served as an invaluable tool for Member Organisations attempting to establish themselves.

All members were increasingly able to participate in WCPT, not just the privileged few. Much of the increasing activity and wide



Delegates voting during the General Meeting in Yokohama, 1999

involvement was enabled by new technologies, which allowed easy communication across huge distances. WCPT also became more efficient, as it incorporated concepts of professional management. But regionalisation and an increased willingness to co-operate with other global bodies also played their part.

Regionalisation

The regionalisation of WCPT, first proposed in the 1950s, finally came to fruition. It was originally planned that there should be six



Participants line up during the expert meeting of physical therapists for care of elderly persons, held in Malta and organised jointly by WCPT and the International Institute on Aging (UN), Malta

1990

WCPT's European, North America Caribbean and Asia West Pacific Regions hold their inaugural meetings.

WCPT's first computer system installed.

Nelson Mandela released from prison after 25 years.

1991

WCPT secretariat moves to new headquarters, in Abbots Place, London.

WCPT Congress held for the second time in London, attended by 3,000 people and opened by the Queen.

Regionalisation policy confirmed.

1992

WCPT holds its first specialist conference, for private practitioners, in Hong Kong.

WCPT logo revised to an oval shape.

1993

WCPT publishes a guide for rehabilitation workers on

working with children with cerebral palsy.

Human genome project launched.

1994

WCPT's Africa Region holds its first Regional Congress.

S America Region formed.

1995

WCPT General Meeting and Congress in Washington DC. Declarations of principle and position statements adopted.

International Private Practitioners Association confirmed as a Sub Group.



Above: The flag-arrayed platform at the Barbican Centre, London, during the opening ceremony of the 1991 Congress



Left: At a meeting of the WCPT Africa Region in 1997 (left to right): Pamela Hansford, Secretary; Dele Amosun, Chairman; David Teager, WCPT President; Emma Saberolles, Vice Chairman

WCPT regions, including an Eastern Mediterranean Region, but this failed to go ahead, and the current five regions were agreed in 1991. Far from splitting up WCPT, the policy proved a means of bringing potentially disparate parts of the confederation together, with Member Organisations having the opportunity to discuss issues of common relevance at regional congresses between WCPT general meetings.

WCPT regions began to take an active role in encouraging the profession in countries which were not currently involved in WCPT. In Europe, for example, they supported and advised organisations from Eastern European countries so that they could work towards high standards and WCPT membership.

Joining members

Organisations admitted or re-admitted to WCPT during the 1990s were:

1991

- Asociacion Nacional de Fisioterapeutas de Guatemala
- Indonesia Physiotherapist Association
- The Physical Therapists Syndicate of Lebanon
- Asociacion Panamena de Fisioterapia y/o Kinesiologia
- Philippines Physical Therapy Association
- Asociacion de Tecnicos de Fisioterapia del Uruguay

1995

- Bermuda Physiotherapy Association
- Sociedad Boliviana de Terapia Fisica
- Bulgarian Association of Kinesitherapists and Rehabilitators
- Union of Czech Physical Therapists
- Fiji Physiotherapy Association
- Association of Hungarian Physiotherapists
- Associazione Italiana Terapisti della Riabilitazione
- Jordanian Physiotherapy Society
- Physiotherapeuten Verband des Furstentums Liechtenstein
- Namibian Society of Physiotherapy
- Slovenian Association of Physiotherapists
- Association of Physiotherapists in Tanzania
- Uganda Association of Physiotherapy

1999

- Confederacion de Kinesiologos y Fisioterapeutas de la Republica Argentina
- Cameroon Society of Physiotherapists
- Croatian Association of Physiotherapists
- Curaçaose Vereniging van Fysiotherapeuten
- Estonian Kinesitherapy Association
- Ethiopian Physiotherapists Association
- Ghana Association of Physiotherapists
- Kuwait Physical Therapy Association
- Latvian Physiotherapists Association
- Lithuanian Kinezitherapy Association
- Physiotherapy Association of Malawi
- Malta Association of Physiotherapists
- Peruvian Kinesiology and Physical Therapy Association
- Federatia Romana A Asociatilor de Kinetoterapie
- Association of Physiotherapists of Swaziland
- Physiotherapy Association of Trinidad and Tobago
- Association of Physiotherapists of Yugoslavia

In 1991 there were reported to be 54 Member Organisations representing a total of 170,000 physical therapists. By 1999, there were 82 representing 225,000.

Margaret O'Hare stands down as WCPT Secretary General and Brenda Myers takes up post.
WCPT News launched.
Work begins on a new corporate identity for WCPT.

1996
WCPT sets 8th September – the date of WCPT's first meeting – as International Physical Therapy Day.
New Regional Fund comes into operation.
WHO predicts TB will kill 30 million in the next decade.

1997
WCPT publishes guides for rehabilitation workers in collaboration with WHO and WFOT.
Hong Kong reverts to China.
1999
WCPT moves to new offices in Victoria, London.

WCPT General Meeting and Congress in Yokohama, Japan.
International Acupuncture Association of Physical Therapists and International Organization of Physical Therapists in Women's Health confirmed

as Sub Groups
New international description of physical therapy agreed.
Work begins on developing a profile of physical therapy around the world.

The 1990s

Collaborative work

Throughout the decade, WCPT developed important projects in co-operation with other global bodies. Notably it continued work on the role of physical therapy in the care of elderly people, begun in the 1980s with a joint project with WHO. It held an expert meeting on ageing with the International Institute on Aging (UN), Malta, and published the report of this in 1992. The following year it organised a course on the same subject.

WCPT began a relationship with the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT) with a series of meetings which began in 1994. The two organisations held their first joint course on physical therapy in the care of torture victims in 1995, and published a book on physiotherapy for torture victims.



Sally Edelsberg, Executive Member for North America Caribbean (left), AJ Fernando, President (centre) and David Teager, Vice President, consult during the 1995 General Meeting in Washington

WCPT also published three international manuals for rehabilitation workers jointly with the World Health Organisation and the World Federation of Occupational Therapists.

Task forces

As the decade progressed, so did the important role of WCPT's Executive Committee in developing policy. Through the Executive, greater consultation was achieved with WCPT Member Organisations. The new opportunities for all physical therapy organisations to be involved were exemplified in the second half of the 90s in the work of WCPT task forces, which took forward a series of major projects through discussion and consultation.

Three task forces were set into motion in 1996. They carried forward work on developing a description of physical therapy, examining quality assurance issues, and examining issues related to the international recruitment, education and credentials of physical therapists.

As a result, WCPT agreed a new declaration on regulation and reciprocity, started a new project on documenting education programmes, raised international interest in quality issues, and agreed a new international description of physical therapy.

Communicating a message

The decade which began with WCPT taking delivery of its first computer ended with communication technology being central to its work and plans. E-mail, the world wide web and faxes revolutionised global communication, and WCPT made use of them to their utmost potential at the centre of its priorities in the second half of the decade,



WCPT Congresses have been visited by monarchs throughout its history. Top: HRH Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom is introduced to delegates at the 1991 Congress in London. Below: Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress of Japan are welcomed for the opening ceremony of the 1999 Congress in Yokohama



Karen Prip, Physiotherapist, RCT (left); Inge Genefke, Honorary Secretary General, IRCT (centre); and Andrej Pilat K, Physiotherapist from Venezuela (right), pictured at the 1997 WCPT/IRCT seminar for physical therapy educators

installing new systems and developing its own website.

But it also recognised the continuing importance of conventional means of communication. WCPT revised old publications, and launched many new ones. It launched WCPT News in 1995, replacing the old newsletter with a professionally produced publication which dealt with international issues in physical therapy as well as internal matters. For Brenda Myers, Secretary General, the moves were important. "WCPT has the potential to be the focal point for a worldwide flow of physical therapy information, providing organisations with new experience and expertise," she said.

For the first time in its history, WCPT also comprehensively examined its corporate image in an attempt to ensure it communicated the right message to the right people. After input from Member Organisations, its new logo and corporate identity was launched in 1997.



WCPT's Secretary Generals in the 1990s (Margaret O'Hare, top, and Brenda Myers, above) have, like their predecessors, placed great emphasis on meeting representatives from Member Organisations around the world

Presidents during the 90s



Brian Davey (Aus) 1988-91

A J Fernando (Can) 1991-95 (pictured above)

David Teager (UK) 1995-99

Sandra Mercer Moore (Aus) 1999- (pictured below)



The Mildred Elson Award

Established with funds from the American Physical Therapy Association, the Mildred Elson Award for international leadership was instituted in 1987, and awarded to Mildred Elson herself in Sydney a few weeks before her death.

Other recipients are:

Elizabeth McKay, 1991

Geoffrey Maitland, 1995

Joan Walker, 1999



Today

Moving forward to physical therapy in the 21st century



“We all want to find the right strategic direction, and we will do so if we work together”

Sandra Mercer Moore,
President

In the twenty first century WCPT is transformed from its modest, though significant beginnings 50 years ago. Subscription fees, originally set at £8 annually (“so that no organisation would be debarred from membership purely on financial grounds”) now stand at thousands of pounds for some countries. Faxes, e-mail, the worldwide web and computers now perform in seconds the tasks performed by the valued office typewriter (purchased with much ado in 1960 for £79) in weeks. And the number of Member Organisations has soared from 11 to 83.

But despite the superficial differences, the core values and aspirations of the Confederation remain very much the same. Here, WCPT’s current President explains how the Confederation will continue to forge new horizons for the profession, and work to ensure better services for patients, beyond its 50th anniversary...

Looking ahead

by WCPT President Sandra Mercer Moore

It is a fascinating time to be President of WCPT. During WCPT’s 50th anniversary, I am honoured and privileged to be visiting various countries to participate in their celebrations marking the confederation’s golden anniversary. When I ask my hosts what they would like me to talk about, there is a common theme to their responses: the opportunities and threats facing physical therapy in the twenty first century. That speaks volumes about the juncture at which the profession feels it currently stands.

As a profession, we feel we are being squeezed by the competition. There are many more disciplines and practitioners in similar areas to physical therapy than there were even 20 years ago, and certainly many more than when WCPT was formed. We see a threat from other professions, de-regulation and competitive policies by governments.

We also see the challenges posed to the profession by the ageing population, and the changes that this will bring to every aspect of life, including health care. Global health priorities are changing, and physical therapists will have to respond. Whereas in the 1950s, when WCPT was in its infancy, the concern was very much the management and control of communicable diseases like polio, lifestyle acquired conditions are now an increasing priority. The proliferation of international physical therapy groups seeking WCPT affiliation in fields such as ageing, sport and occupational health is an indication that priorities are changing. And, as people live



The Indian Association of Physiotherapy has produced 50th anniversary sun visors to mark WCPT’s big birthday – proudly displayed here at the association’s joint conference in November 2000

longer, I suspect bone and joint problems will also take up an increasing part of our workload. Physical therapists will be increasingly involved in health promotion, providing more and more information to help people take responsibility for their own health. WHO is trying to address this problem in its bone and joint decade.

However, the changes and threats give rise to real opportunities. We all want to find the right strategic direction, and we will do so if we work together. We need to identify the specific brand of physical therapy, and communicate its unique qualities not just to patients, but to government, policy makers, and those who pay for the provision of our services. WCPT has an important role to play in bringing together that information, and helping the profession market itself globally.

With the increasing speed and ease of global communication, WCPT can increasingly become the centre of an international network of information exchange. It is helping Member Organisations take an active stance on issues which affect them, and in a way similar to organisations representing the profession elsewhere in the world. The confederation is an excellent conduit, and by helping people share and consult we can prevent duplication and help the profession achieve a global consistency. Physical therapy has become a very diverse and broad based profession, so it will become particularly important to achieve global recognition of our core competencies – our absolute reason for being.

Some completed projects, like the international description of physical therapy, have already shown the way in such work. They identify areas on which we all agree and are invaluable because they place the emphasis on what we have in common, not our differences. That has been a central purpose of WCPT for its first fifty years and will continue to be for the next.

A word from some Member Organisations

"We have shown all state and private national organisations that we have a confederation that supports us through cooperation and exchange of information, and that stimulates research, education, practice and in general the development of physical therapy worldwide. We have in turn been able to show physical therapists in our country that WCPT has become the beacon for physical therapy associations worldwide."

Asociacion Colombiana de Fisioterapia

"In 1982 the association joined the WCPT after two years of provisional membership. The aim of joining 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 experience of other countries. We think WCPT has taken very necessary steps in recent years, allowing the views of all countries to be counted."

Iranian Physiotherapy Association

"A main task of the Association of Physiotherapists of Yugoslavia, since its formation in 1994, has been to enter into international cooperation with other associations of physiotherapists. Thanks to such commitments, the Association was accepted as a full member of WCPT in 1999, accepting all its standards and ethical principles."

Association of Physiotherapists of Yugoslavia



Today's WCPT Executive Committee pictured at the Ingeniørhuset Centre in Copenhagen during their 2001 meeting, almost exactly 50 years after WCPT was first formed in the same rooms

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