

EDITORIAL-CONVIDADO

The importance of scientific publications in the professional development of sports physiotherapists: Do we need quantity or do we need quality?

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It is an honor and a pleasure to contribute this guest editorial to the *Portuguese Sports Physiotherapy Journal*. The topic “*the importance of scientific publications in the professional development of sports physiotherapists*” is I believe timely and important, as it reflects the fundamental mission of the *Journal of Orthopaedic & Sports Physical Therapy (JOSPT)*: sharing high-quality, clinically relevant information to promote optimal care by sports and orthopaedic physiotherapists. I am also delighted by the opportunity for *JOSPT* to partner with the *Sports Physiotherapy Interest Group* of the *Portuguese Association of Physiotherapists* and provide members with on-line access to our published articles and other materials. We hope that this partnership can contribute to the growth of our clinical practice and science.

As I prepared to write this guest editorial, I was thinking back on how knowledge, education, and practice have changed over the 25 years I have been a physiotherapist. The systematic investigation of diagnostic techniques and treatment approaches through clinical trials, combined with sophisticated tools such as computers and modern imaging and measurement techniques have generated a recent exponential growth in our knowledge. Simultaneous to this rapid expansion in knowledge is the equally rapid expansion of technology used to quickly transfer written information. This technology has afforded clinicians, educators, and researchers the means to access, search, and share information with increasingly greater ease and speed. Ultimately, our hope is that this new information leads to improved practice and quality of care for our patients. But unfortunately, although the tools do exist, it is well known that incorporating new knowledge into clinical practice remains a monumental challenge — a challenge that I believe both scientific publications and clinicians must work together to overcome. Journals have to make every effort to provide easy access to high-quality content that helps clinicians in their daily clinical practice, and clinicians must adopt a culture of

life-long learning through regular reading of new clinical and scientific information. I believe that the Sports Physiotherapy Interest Group is showing great leadership in facilitating this process for its members. Maintaining high-quality clinical practice in sports physiotherapy mandates that clinicians be life-long learners. Accordingly it is my strong opinion that all clinicians should regularly read a minimum of 1 or 2 high-quality journals that are most relevant to their clinical practice. A systematic and regular process of reading selected articles from a few scientific journals provides over time not only an update on new knowledge but also a perspective on new ideas and evolving concepts in our field. Such a practice, however, should not replace the need to perform a more thorough and rigorous search of the literature when a specific clinical question arises. A regular consumer of research will, I believe, find great satisfaction in being an active witness to the growth of our knowledge and will also find the process of systematically searching the broader base of literature, when necessary, a much easier and non-threatening task. Clearly, while we should welcome the current exponential growth in knowledge related to sports physiotherapy, it is also quite reasonable to feel overwhelmed by the amount of new information. Therefore, the second topic I wish to address is *do we need more information or do we need better quality information?* Such a question is reasonable and may seem quite easy to answer. It would be hard to argue against a policy of promoting a lesser number of manuscripts with the intention of publishing only the highest quality papers: in other words, maximize the exposure of the very best information while minimizing the rest. In fact, that is what scientific journals try to accomplish through their review process. While this approach may seem reasonable and in fact necessary, it must be acknowledged that many lines of enquiries that eventually led to important discoveries started with

seemingly mundane or simple observations or preliminary studies. But when shared through publication, these very studies may have provided impetus to pursue higher quality or more extensive research. So, a clear line of what constitutes “better quality” is difficult to define. Yet, for the clinicians interested in regularly accessing the literature, it is important that they be able to judge the scope and intent of the research being published. Most importantly, it is imperative that readers be able to recognize the quality of the various articles, a process that can be greatly facilitated if journals insist that authors dutifully present the weaknesses of their studies and how these weaknesses may impact their findings. The ability to read and understand research is very much like any clinical skills—it must be regularly practiced to improve.

It must be pointed out that the quality of a publication should not be confused with the kind of publication. Many clinicians perceive randomized clinical trials as being higher quality publications than case reports, for example. While the findings of a randomized clinical trial may be ranked higher than those of a case report from the perspective of evidence-based practice, this classification is not automatically reflective of the quality of the manuscripts. It is possible to have very high

quality case reports just as it is possible to have very poor quality randomized clinical trials. These two types of manuscripts serve different but equally important purposes for building a balanced literature. Clinicians may learn tremendously from a well-written case report that presents a diagnostic process or treatment approach for a patient with a rare condition for example. Conversely, a poor-quality randomized clinical trial, with several serious methodological flaws, may present results of questionable usefulness despite having a large number of patients in the study.

“None of us is as smart as all of us,” a simple quote by Keith Blanchard which I have used before, speaks clearly to the role scientific journals can play in the development of a profession and each of its members. This role is to facilitate sharing new information among both clinicians and researchers, so that we can all benefit from new clinical observations and scientific discoveries. In today’s rapid growth in knowledge, all sports physiotherapists wishing to provide high-quality care should be taking advantage of the wisdom of “all of us” by accessing the information provided by scientific publications. Keeping up with the professional literature should no longer be considered an extra duty; it should be a regular part of our practice.