EDITORIAL
Eva Bower – APCP Editor

In these days of evidence-based treatment, few interventions are as controversial as physiotherapy for children with Cerebral Palsy (CP). Moreover this debate is not recent. Thirty years ago, in 1982, Pearson lamented the fact that whilst massive sums of money were spent on unproven physiotherapy services for children with CP, little was being invested in research to evaluate its worth. A decade earlier in 1976, Pless argued in favour of scientifically controlled studies of physiotherapy for CP. These trials would allow re-examination of clinical practices in the field of physiotherapy for CP that had evolved from customs into laws.

In a recent after-dinner speech a 2012 paralympian athlete, Sophia Warner, jokingly said, “Physiotherapy does not work. I have still got Cerebral Palsy.”

This view was raised as early as 1968 by Mead, at an American Academy of Cerebral Palsy and Developmental Medicine conference. He pointed out that whilst many plenary speakers had declared that there was no scientific support for cure with the various techniques of Phelps, Kabat, Bobath, Rood and Doman Delacato, only one of these methods actually aimed to cure children with CP and that the others all hoped to ameliorate the physical problems of CP.

We all really know that physiotherapy cannot take CP away, it cannot cure CP. How often do we make this clear to the children, their parents and carers?

I suspect that we often do not and we allow them to believe that the natural improvements in motor skills, which are actually due to developmental maturation, are a result of our interventions. How often have I said, “Look, isn’t he getting better?” I would like to suggest that we all need to be more honest with children, parents, carers and ourselves.

Can our true role in the care of children with CP be to help to remove physical and psychological barriers, both the children’s own and those imposed by their carers, and to open up new horizons with them? Should our task be to suggest strategies to make activity and participation easier?

Looking back over a career of 50 years as a physiotherapist for children with CP, I think my primary role was to try to enable the children and their families to live with CP as happily as possible.

References


