



In an article I downloaded some time ago, the authors posed the question: "Has research become an opportunity for self-indulgence or is (it regarded as) a ... professional responsibility?"<sup>1</sup>

In other words, do practitioners only engage in research when there is some tangible 'reward' on offer? This 'reward' mainly entails either obtaining a higher qualification or generating revenue for one's institution. This seems to be the trend, considering that in excess of 90% of all submissions to the SAJOT originates from some under- or post-graduate course requirement. There are of course numerous possible reasons for this trend, including:

- ❖ Most of the clinical research conducted by clinical therapists is published elsewhere. If this is the case, then we need to investigate to determine why this is happening\*;
- ❖ The clinical research being done is not publishable, not reported or not financially viable; or
- ❖ Clinical research is not being conducted.

The benefits of collaboration between academic departments and their students (either graduate or post-graduate), is evident in the high quality of studies conducted, reported and eventually published in our Journal.

However, there is considerable potential for even greater dialogue between university departments, professional bodies and practitioners within the various continuing professional development (CPD) programmes offered, and we have a responsibility to support the creation of a research-rich culture in which the desired outcomes of both practitioners and our clients, may be achieved.

The modern age of digital information, data bases and technology in general, further offers great potential for this kind of dialogue through the dissemination and availability of information.

I strongly believe that in most training programmes, a focus on enquiry-based practice is sustained, so why then, is this not the case throughout clinical therapists' professional careers, so that disciplined innovation and collaborative enquiry are imbedded within practice areas and become the 'norm' for professional practice rather than the exception? Do our clinical therapists lack the capacity, motivation, confidence, opportunity or adequate competitive compensation packages to do so?

The questions that we now need to ask are: Do our training institutions and Professional bodies, have formal procedures or mechanisms in place to assist clinical therapists with research-related tasks in order to engage in research *simply for the sake of improving the service they render to clients when and if the opportunity arises?* For example providing assistance/guidance with:

- ❖ uniform, structured digital record-keeping (data gathering)
- ❖ identifying funding sources;
- ❖ identifying potential collaborators and grant opportunities;
- ❖ writing grant proposals; and
- ❖ revising grant proposals after rejection;<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, clinical therapists share the responsibility of continuously developing their research literacy, not only while in training but also throughout their careers. They are faced daily with a multitude of opportunities to engage in research and enquiry, collaborating with colleagues in other departments or at universities to find out 'what works well and what doesn't, and why'.

"Research and enquiry need not, and must not, become a burden on a profession that sometimes struggles with the weight of the various demands rightly or wrongly placed upon it"<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, I am not suggesting that every therapist should be required to be actively and continuously involved in research, the existing workload and performance pressures they have to deal with preclude this. The contention is rather that every therapist should be empowered to have the confidence, motivation, ability and capability to engage in research and inquiry, and that university departments and our Association should provide the kind of sustained support required to do so.

It remains the professional responsibility of all of us to take up this challenge.

## REFERENCES

1. Brooker R and Macpherson I. Communicating the process and outcomes of practitioner research: an opportunity for self-indulgence or a serious professional responsibility? *Journal of Education Action Research*, Vol. 7:2.
2. Sung NS, Crowley WFC, Genel M, Salber P, Sherwood LM, Johnson SB, Catanese VD, Tilson H, Getz K, Larson EL, Scheinberg D, Reece EA, Slavkin H, Dobs A, Grebb J, Martinez RA, Korn A and Rimoin D. Central Challenges Facing the National Clinical Research Enterprise. *JAMA*, 2003;289(1).

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\*I will welcome any comments, suggestions or dialogue in this regard.

