



History as an educational tool in Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine. A call for historical papers to be published in the European Journal of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine

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In recent years several scientific journals have turned their attention to the reconstruction of the historical evolution of medical disciplines,¹⁻³ whose educational value has become increasingly recognised.¹

Knowing the history of our own discipline is essential for many reasons. Firstly the sense of belonging that this knowledge generates, especially for young people: holding the thread that binds us to the tradition of our discipline allows us to find common roots and learn how knowledge of it has evolved. In this age of high specialisation and segmentation, keeping alive the heritage of the profession as a whole reduces technicality and depersonalisation, two concepts antithetical to the rehabilitative model. Moreover history allows us to understand where we come from, and consequently where we are probably going; it also opens our eyes to the mistakes of previous masters, allowing us to avoid future repetitions.

The role of the specialist in Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine (PRM) in the 21st century cannot be separated from all the experiences that have led to the current definition, knowledge and intuition of the great masters. They have applied theoretical knowledge to clinical practice creating the conditions for PRM science, albeit with the historical limitations of a past in which there was no culture of evidence-based medicine.

This is especially true in a discipline such as PRM, in which the areas of clinical intervention are mul-

tipale. Not surprisingly, the PRM Section of the European Union of Medical Specialists (UEMS), the European Board of PRM, the European Academy of PRM and the European Society of PRM have felt the need to publish the “White Book of PRM in Europe”⁴⁻⁷ “to set out the nature, area of work and parameters of PRM, the competencies of the specialty and the nature of its specialists, the clinical content of the work of the specialty and the nature of the education and training of specialists in this field”. Other authors, under the auspices of the UEMS PRM Section Professional Practice Committee, are similarly committed to defining the role of the PRM specialist in major diseases of interest.⁸⁻¹⁴

Often some names are known to young doctors but without awareness of the period and place in which they carried out their activities. Rarely do we go back to the neurophysiological assumptions and the historical context in which a therapeutic method such as Kabat, Doman-Delacato or physical therapies, such as electrotherapy, have been developed. Historicise some innovative proposals with respect to the period in which they were disseminated is important for understanding their conceptual substrate and their therapeutic importance.

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The aim of resurrecting the history of a discipline, and above all of the big names that recur, should not be so much celebrative in itself, as rather a means to improve the teaching of the present discipline through a review of the successes and sometimes failures of the past.

Remembering a famous author or a scientific thought can potentially create an inspiration for new generations, providing benchmark conceptual models and links with other experiences. Nevertheless, the knowledge of how casually and sometimes in an almost anecdotal way certain insights were then transformed into instruments of clinical intervention is certainly a fascinating source of knowledge.

We should not forget the role that a medical discipline plays in the social fabric of a given epoch. This is especially important for rehabilitative medicine with the transition from the system of classification of diseases (ICD) to definition of the consequences of disease (ICIDH), which has expanded the role of PRM, not only to the medical vocation but also to the function and its social connotation. There has been considerable debate about whether the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) could represent a unifying model for the conceptual description of PRM.¹⁵⁻¹⁷ Even the definition of PRM has been the subject of attention,^{18, 19} to see among other things if the historical origin of the double denomination “physical and rehabilitation medicine”, still makes sense in a modern context.^{20, 21}

Finally, a reason to deal with the historical perspective of rehabilitation is that the systematisation of knowledge of a particular topic can provide insights to enable us to understand where the information is incomplete, unreliable, confusing or redundant (for example in the field of rating scales), and where there is need for further research.

Often the cataloguing of available material, as well as systematic reviews, help us capture the state of the art in a certain topic and then make progress in that area of knowledge. Just think of the recent introduction of advanced technological devices such as robotics for PRM, for which we have not yet a historical overview nor do we know how comparatively effective it is.

Like other magazines before us, in this number we want to start reviewing topics of historical interest related to PRM.

Several approaches can be used to propose historical works, from single concepts in thematic lines, reconstruction of historical eras, description of innovative technologies, portraits of important people and their heritage, to the recovery of historical documents relating to debates, conferences, health policy etc.

Some examples of papers on the history of journals, societies and organisations that dealt and still deal with PRM in Europe have already been published, specifically by the European Journal of PRM. In an article of 2005 published by Negrini *et al.* in *Europa Medicophysica* (the previous name of our Journal),²² the history of the journal is described, starting in 1964 with Dario Fiandese Chief-editor, up to 1986. In 2007 Bardot and Tonazzi²³ published an article in *Europa Medicophysica*, recalling the origin and development of rehabilitation associations in Europe. They wrote about the first International Congress of Rehabilitation that was held in London in 1952. Historical notes on European Journals have been published,²⁴ while looking at the creation of the European Journal Network,^{25, 26} and the history of thermal treatment was reviewed on Italy's 150th anniversary.^{27, 28} More recently the 50th Anniversary of our Journal provided a good reason for investigating our roots.^{29, 30}

It is possible to find historical papers in other PRM journals too. In 2006 Ward and Gutenbrunner published an article in the *Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine* describing Physical medicine and rehabilitation in a European context and underlining how the specialty continues to expand.³¹ In a collaboration with our Journal,^{32, 33} in 2008 Bertolini and Delarque published an article in the *American Journal of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation* on the history of the European Organisation of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation.³⁴ Finally in 2012 Marilyn Moffat³⁵ conducted a review of the literature on the history of education in Physical Therapy worldwide from antiquity to the present day, paying particular attention to current standards for the training of physiotherapists.

With our present call we invite all interested authors to make their own contribution through the *European Journal of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine* to the historical reconstruction of rehabilitation areas of common interest.

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