

Suggested Areas of Research

As I have been cataloguing the files, have noticed a number of prominent themes which I believe warrant further research.

From the 1950s to the 1970s there was a shortage of physiotherapists in New Zealand, particularly those qualified to work in a supervisory or specialist role. I suspect this is because the profession was female dominated, and during this period New Zealand had a very high marriage rate, and a very low rate of married women's participation in paid work. A number of the sources make reference to, or infer that female physiotherapists were the norm. Due to the frequent inclusion of lists of names of students and physiotherapists in the files, it would be possible for someone to construct a database to examine the gender balance in the profession, and also whether women were remaining in work for only a relatively short period before marrying.

Further to this, many studies have shown that female dominated professions tend to be underpaid and perceived to be of a lower status than male dominated professions with similar qualifications. This may be a useful starting point to a study of the conditions of work for physiotherapists and they way in which other medical professionals saw and see physiotherapists.

I have suggested to Dave Nicholls that a glossary of terms be included on the website. There may also be a need to examine the development and use of different terms to describe what we now call physiotherapy. This term seems to have come into popular use post-World War II, and prior to this massage therapy seems to predominate. Such a study would lead into the issues physiotherapists faced trying to separate their profession from amateur masseurs and especially 'red-light' masseuses. More generally there seems to have been a concern about exactly where physiotherapists stood in relation to other health or quasi-health professionals and certainly physiotherapists were keen to distance themselves from chiropractors, massage therapists and naturopaths.

Another major area is the provision of physiotherapy training and education. The setting up of a second physiotherapy school caused much discussion and there was also much discussion and research about the best place to teach physiotherapy – hospitals, polytechnics or technical institutes or universities. Some of the discussions would related to the professionalization of the occupation.

I would also note briefly that of all the lists of grades included in the files, the students generally had poor results with 'C' being easily the most common grade and only a few 'B's and almost no 'A's.

As well, when it came to recruitment, establishing reciprocal registration and other connections, the major focus was always the UK, and Australia and Canada are rarely mentioned.

In the early part of the study period most physiotherapists seem to have worked in hospitals or for the government in some form, whereas now my perception is that the majority work in private practice. This change and the relationship of physiotherapists with ACC would be another area to explore, as would the impact of the introduction of ACC on the physiotherapy profession.