

Narrative Report

Changing Face of Pediatric Physiotherapy in India– As I Saw It Over the Years

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I firmly believe that our life's journey is pre-destined, but how well we choose to travel it, is determined by us. My journey as a young therapist started on completion of my basic graduation course in physical therapy from Baroda. The burning question was where to pursue higher studies. The choice was between the USA and India; and I eventually decided on AIIPMR, Mumbai. This is the place which opened my eyes to the field of neuro-rehabilitation and pediatrics.

The field of Pediatrics started stimulating my appetite to learn more and I could accomplish this with the help of great teachers who were stalwarts in this field. Here I must mention Dr Mokashi, Dr Dastoor & Prof Sahani, who showed me scientific methods to understand the human brain and movement, and how it impacted function. On completion of my stint in the rehab center at AIIPMR, Mumbai, I felt I knew it all. In retrospect, I had just gained a speck of knowledge.

In those days, the treatment intervention to treat children was purely based on the sequential developmental milestone pattern.

In the year 1993, I flew with my husband for a holiday to Minneapolis, USA, where I had the opportunity to observe treatment given to children at the university hospital. This was an eye-opener for me. It made me realise how much more I had to learn, and this proved to be the turning point in my life. This visit led to me to take my first steps in my journey towards the world of Neurodevelopment Treatment (NDT) and Sensory Integration (SI).

My tryst with education

I certified in NDT in the year 1996-97, during which period, my brain grey matter and CNS all

went through an overhaul. Around this time period, I also participated in several courses on sensory processing dysfunction and sensory integration.

The observation, analysis, and handling skills I received during my basic NDT /Bobath training provided me many opportunities. Over the years I have taught many courses, with my mentors, either in the US or in other parts of the world. In India, we conduct pediatric neuro camps in various parts of the country.

NDT helped me envision the world of function, organize my thought process keeping the perspective of function in mind and implement it in my clinical practice to bring about a functional change in CP children and a create a difference in the quality of life they lived..

Turning Challenges into Opportunities

My professional career has several major focuses. First and foremost, I am a clinician in my heart and mind. I have always chosen to schedule a heavy caseload of client for direct care. I have been fortunate to work in multiple environments in my early years as a clinician, but also, to work in one city for the past 17 years. I therefore have had the opportunity to treat several children from infancy to young adulthood. I want individuals with CP to be able to function to their full potential at every age. To be able to participate in their family and community life and to have their own life's mission fulfilled. Physical therapists are critical in helping these individuals reach their full potential. Yet, I am concerned that the current health care environment may limit the provision of these services. I want to contribute to the evidence that direct 'hands on therapy' is reflective of the "best" practice.

A second role that I feel is core to my practice and

mission is that of teaching. Teaching is important to me at many levels. I teach my clients new functional activities, to experience new postures and movements as I build on their strengths and treat specific impairments. I teach the parents how to manage their child's impairments and functional limitations to help them facilitate their child's fuller participation in the family, at school and in the community. I also teach other clinicians how to more effectively assess, treat and manage individuals with CNS dysfunction. Finally, the teaching is to communities around the world, to advocate for fuller inclusion of all people, recognizing that everyone has gifts to share and needs that are best met by sharing with others.

Every day arrives with challenges to us both individually and as a nation—challenges that could cause anxiety, fear and depression. However, those challenges provide us with an opportunity to change and adapt. For me the slogan “Yes, we can” is both heartening and motivating; it can be applied to just about all aspects of life, including our plans for growing and expanding the services of Pediatric physiotherapy.

Pediatric therapy needs to continue developing the body of research related to our practice One of our challenges is to increase services for the family/caregiver all over the nation.

Giving back to society

The focus of my mission is to constantly learn and grow. I learn daily from my clients. I learn from their parents and caregivers. I learn from my colleagues as we participate in teamwork or in continuing education. I learn by reading, by researching, by teaching, by reflecting carefully on what I do and how it could be improved.

Finally, I am a citizen of the world. I have had the opportunity to work and live in several different cultures. I enjoy meeting people from all parts of the world and realizing that we are all the same at the same as time as being so different. I have economic resources that are not available in many parts of this country or in other nations. At this time I am establishing ties with therapists in other developing countries and different states in India. I travel to assess and treat children there,

to provide some basic adaptive equipment and to teach therapists how to more effectively treat these children. It is one more way that I feel my mission has been met.

As a physical therapist, I have certainly seen the profession grow in the past years. When I first graduated from University of M.S. University (Baroda) and immediately accepted a job working with individuals with developmental disabilities at all India Institute of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation - Mumbai, I remember the response of my colleagues. They felt I was leaving the field of physical therapy. Now, the scenario has completely changed. There are scores of young graduates wanting to do pediatrics or neurology. We have recognized clinical pediatrics as a specialty. I feel that the field has changed because of new information, different understanding of that information and new technologies. Shifts in the theoretical foundations of practice bring about a change in practice. It is therefore necessary to stay current with the theoretical shifts. In addition our client population has changed. I could have never imagined assessing an infant born at 20 weeks gestation to a HIV positive mother. Yet those referrals are a reality today. The health care environment today requires that we demonstrate evidence that our treatment is effective. We are expected to promote greater function and participation with limited number of visits. We must be able to justify our intervention. We are becoming the team members who are responsible for the diagnosis of posture and movement problems, as well as for their treatment.

As a therapist with many years of clinical experience I want to help lead the next generation of therapists, who are caring and compassionate and who have a serving attitude; clinicians who recognize the integration of mind, body and spirit and who are lifelong learners. I want to help develop continuing education courses to provide environments for lifelong learning for the next generation of pediatric therapists.

My goal is to help create effective health care policies and practice in India, and to work internationally to make these ideas feasible in diverse cultures and in less developed parts of the world.

