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SYMPOSIUM FEEDBACK

The Future of Physiotherapy

FIONA SCHEEPERS AND SEJENG MOGANE

The Physiotherapy Symposium was well-planned and provided an opportunity to reflect on the profession's current role and future direction. As such, our discussions highlighted the need for physiotherapists to embrace innovation while maintaining evidence-based, ethical and patient-centred care.

Key Themes

Innovation and Technology

Digital healthcare, telehealth, artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies offer opportunities to improve access, rehabilitation and clinical decision-making. These tools should complement professional judgement and the therapeutic relationship.

Evidence-Based Practice and Lifelong Learning

The evolving healthcare environment requires physiotherapists to remain

informed and adaptable through ongoing professional development, research and evidence-based clinical practice.

Prevention and Health Promotion

Physiotherapy has an expanding role beyond rehabilitation, including roles in promoting exercise, injury prevention, chronic disease management, healthy ageing, workplace health and community-based care.

Patient-Centred and Collaborative Care

Future practice should continue to involve patients in decisions about their care and focus on meaningful functional outcomes. Collaboration with other healthcare professionals will support comprehensive patient care.

Access and Professional Advocacy

Improving access to physiotherapy, particularly in underserved

communities, remains important. The profession should also continue to highlight its contribution to health, function, independence and quality of life.

Personal Reflection

A particularly special aspect of the symposium was the opportunity to reconnect with former classmates and lecturers after 20 years. Sharing experiences, memories and professional journeys created a meaningful sense of connection and reminded me of how much the profession (and each of us) has evolved.

important to remember that the work one does reflects on the profession as a whole. One important principle is to remember to be patient-centred always and refer to another physiotherapist or specialist if there is a need.

The symposium reinforced the importance of remaining curious, adaptable and committed to lifelong learning. While technology and healthcare delivery will continue to change, the core of physiotherapy remains helping people improve movement, function, independence and

the future of physiotherapy lies in combining innovation with compassionate, patient-centred care

The academic involvement in the profession needs to be reviewed because of the challenges that the profession is facing, and especially because there are new graduates every year who face an uncertain future.

Entrepreneurship needs to be stressed in discussions with physiotherapists to solve the business and financial challenges that physiotherapists face.

Physiotherapists need to do their work with passion and be professional at all times. It's always

quality of life.

Recommendation

The success of the symposium demonstrates the value of creating regular opportunities for physiotherapists to connect and share experiences.

Its value in providing an opportunity for continued professional development, networking, collaboration and reconnecting with colleagues and mentors cannot be overstated.

Conclusion

The symposium showed that our profession has significant potential to adapt and expand its contribution to healthcare. It also demonstrated that the future of physiotherapy will require innovation, collaboration and evidence-based practice, while retaining the crucial human connection at the centre of patient care.

In short, the future of physiotherapy lies in combining innovation with compassionate, patient-centred care to help



people move, function and live well. 

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BEYOND SPONSORSHIP

CREATING SHARED VALUE THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

CHANTELLE JOLLIFFE

A successful professional event is rarely created by one organisation alone. It is built through an ecosystem of speakers, delegates, organisers, sponsors, partners and exhibitors, each contributing something different to the experience.

At the SASP Symposium 2026, which was held under the theme “Taking Physiotherapy into the Future”, one of the clearest lessons that can be taken from it is the value of carefully aligned partnerships. The success of the Symposium was not simply a result of securing sponsorships or filling exhibition space. It was about working with organisations that are relevant to the profession, appropriate to the environment and able to add real value to the experience of all the delegates who attended.

Relevance before visibility

For a professional association such as the SASP, the starting point has to be both a concern for the member and for the profession. Delegates attend a symposium to learn, exchange ideas, engage with colleagues and explore developments shaping their work. Thus, all commercial participation should support that purpose, rather than compete with it.

The question is therefore not simply who wants to sponsor the event, but rather discovering who belongs in this environment, what they can contribute, and where their brand aligns with the needs of the profession. When those elements come together cohesively, sponsorship becomes partnership.

Shared value in practice

This principle shaped the

partnership ecosystem around the 2026 Symposium. Garrun CFP and iTOO partnered with the SASP on the Forensic Audit Summit. iNova Pharmaceuticals partnered on the Future Practice Forum, supported by VALD as Technology Partner, and RMA supported the SASP Youth Indaba.

Within the main Symposium programme, Bookem supported the plenary on AI and the Future of Physiotherapy, GEMS supported Technology in Health Care, and HiTech Therapy supported the plenary on Ethics and the Use of AI.

Each partnership was different, yet each had a credible connection to the content, audience and purpose of the event. Rather than forcing every organisation into the same sponsorship template, the Symposium created opportunities for brands to engage where there was a natural fit.

Fit for purpose, fit for audience, fit for place

We took the same approach to the exhibition environment, and the delegate feedback that came from it was encouraging. The organisations present felt relevant, useful and appropriate to the event because they added value and belonged in the space.

The exhibition included Garrun CFP, iTOO, Data-Med, Elle, Ergotherapy, RMA, Alora Medical, Bookem, BTL Medical, iNova Pharmaceuticals, HiTech Therapy, DOCY and Ecomed Medical.

Together, these organisations brought products, services, technologies and expertise into direct conversation with physiotherapists. Several partners also participated across multiple touchpoints, combining sponsorship with exhibition engagement and allowing conversations started in plenary sessions or workshops to continue outside the room.

The exhibition floor is part of the learning environment

Physiotherapy is a practical and evolving profession. Clinicians work in an environment shaped by new technology, equipment, services, practice solutions and changing models of healthcare delivery. An exhibition creates an opportunity to encounter those developments directly.

A conversation at a stand may introduce a physiotherapist to a solution they did not know existed. A product demonstration may prompt a clinical question. Just as importantly, the industry gains direct insight into the needs and challenges of the professionals it serves through this contact. The value flows both ways.

Partnership Makes Ambition Possible

However, this does not simply happen. There are numerous practicalities that have to be addressed for any event to be successful, and high-quality professional events require



significant investment. Venues, audiovisual infrastructure, catering, accreditation, technology, speaker requirements, programme materials and event operations all carry costs, and they add up quickly.

Sponsorship and exhibition investment, therefore, help make

ambitious professional-development platforms possible. But financial contribution is only one measure of success.

A more significant measure of success is whether the partnership improves the experience. The questions that had to be asked after the event were: Was it

relevant? Did it add something useful? Did the organisation belong in that environment?

The answer from our delegate experience was overwhelmingly positive for Symposium 2026. The brands were fit for purpose, audience and place.

Thank You for Partnering with Us

To our Symposium sponsors and partners – iNova Pharmaceuticals, Garrun CFP, iTOO, HiTech Therapy, Bookem, GEMS, VALD and RMA – thank you for investing in the profession and contributing meaningfully to the programme.

And to our exhibitors – Garrun CFP, iTOO, Data-Med, Elle, Ergotherapy, RMA, Alora Medical,

Bookem, BTL Medical, iNova Pharmaceuticals, HiTech Therapy, DOCY and Ecomed Medical – thank you for bringing your people, products, services, technologies and expertise into the Symposium environment.

The 2026 Symposium showed that when there is genuine alignment between an association, its members and its partners, everyone can gain.

The best partnerships do more than make an event possible. They make it more relevant, more valuable and ultimately better. 



REFLECTIONS ON THE YOUTH INDABA AND SYMPOSIUM



Refentse Kgoatle

Stepping away from the traditional lecture halls and clinical blocks to attend a professional gathering like the SASP Youth Indaba offers a vital education in professional identity. The symposium was much more than a series of academic talks and was more like a blueprint for entering the physiotherapy profession, managing our expectations and learning to adapt in the future.

Challenging perspectives and value-driven practice

One of the most striking takeaways

from the Indaba was how it reframed what it means to be a clinician. One of the central nuggets I captured from the sessions was “when one decides from a good heart, the universe conspires to make it happen”. This challenged the rigid, purely clinical mindset we have developed in university, and urged us instead to hold ourselves accountable and let our lives be value-based. Success, as emphasised during the event, is not measured in traditional achievements, but rather in your contributions and your overall

impact to the world around you.

Mapping out a career beyond being a student

As a student preparing to cross the threshold into community service, the event was a critical guide for personal and professional survival and development. I identified four landmark points to help me and other students in our professional development:

- Establishing boundaries: Define your personal values, boundaries and unique foundational pillar.
- Self-advocacy and creation: Actively advocate for yourself and create your own opportunities rather than waiting for them to happen.
- Embracing growth: Forgive yourself for mistakes, give yourself exposure, and maintain a deep sense of curiosity.
- Flexibility: Allow space for your passions to evolve over time and recognise that your career path doesn't have to be linear.

Navigating a high-level professional space while still a student is intimidating at times, but the Youth Indaba experience emphasised the necessity of connection, even if it is uncomfortable. Another major takeaway of mine is the importance of putting yourself out there through networks and partnerships and keeping your professional circle close. Getting the chance to interact with seasoned physiotherapists went

some way towards making that happen, while also bridging the gap between academia and real-world practice.

Looking Ahead

Ultimately, the symposium left me grounded, reflective, and deeply optimistic about the future and I feel more equipped to enter the profession. It's difficult to put my experience into words because of how impactful the experience was. However, if I were to put three words to capturing it, they would be: *transformative, impactful* and *inspiring*.





Vuyelo Baloyi

The Youth Indaba and Symposium were more than simply two professional events for me, and they have left a significant mark on my life. However, in many ways, the journey itself became part of the experience, and I learnt much just getting to the events.

The Journey

On the morning of the event, there was some uncertainty around transport arrangements. As students, we were eager to attend, but getting there required coordination and support from several people. I am grateful to everyone who contributed to making the transport arrangements work, including Mr Mawela, Dr Tshabalala and Prof Maleka. It reminded me that student participation in

professional spaces does not happen automatically. There are people behind the scenes who must open doors, coordinate, support and sometimes go the extra mile to ensure that students can be present.

Most importantly, I want to acknowledge Monique Koopman, President of SASP, for allowing us to be part of these professional spaces. That opportunity meant a lot to me because it allowed us students to experience the profession beyond the university environment.

I must also thank Ester Venter, SASP Professional Officer, for creating opportunities for student engagement and professional development. Her involvement

reinforced for me that professional organisations have an important role to play in preparing the next generation of physiotherapists.

Finally, I would also like to acknowledge Pheto Moumakoe-Modingwana, whose presence and contribution added to the experience and reminded me of the importance of young professionals creating spaces where students can engage, learn and see possibilities for themselves.

The Youth Indaba

The Youth Indaba challenged the way I had previously viewed my position as a student.

At university, it is easy to become focused on passing modules, completing clinical blocks and eventually getting the qualification. The Indaba reminded me that being a student does not mean being disconnected from the profession. We are already part of the profession's future.

A few things stood out to me at the indaba, namely the importance of youth participation, leadership, mentorship, professional development and having a voice.

I also realised that we sometimes wait for opportunities to be created for us, when young people can also be part of creating those opportunities themselves. The Indaba made me think beyond simply asking, "What can physiotherapy offer me?" and start

asking, "What can I contribute to physiotherapy?"

That was a significant shift for me.

The Symposium

The Symposium also left a significant mark on me and opened me to a different perspective.

There is a big difference between learning about physiotherapy from a lecture slide and sitting in a room alongside experienced physiotherapists who are discussing the profession, its challenges and its future.

Being there as a student was both humbling and motivating.

It reminded me that graduating is not the end of learning. The qualification gives you a foundation, but the profession requires continuous development, relationships, leadership, advocacy, research and the willingness to understand the broader healthcare system.

I also had the opportunity to interact with people such as Rita Henn, Prof Maleka, Ester Venter and Dr Komati. Those interactions were meaningful, and they showed me the importance of putting yourself in spaces where you can learn from people who have walked the road before you.

The events did not completely change how I see physiotherapy. Rather, they expanded my understanding of it.

I may still be a student, but I am already part of the profession.

I have always understood physiotherapy as a profession centred around patient care. But I now see more clearly that being a physiotherapist can also mean being a researcher, educator, entrepreneur, leader, advocate, policy contributor, sports professional, or simply someone who creates opportunities for others.

I also left feeling more optimistic about my future, not because I suddenly think the profession is easy, but because I could see more possibilities than I had before. However, perhaps the biggest lesson I took from both events is this:

I may still be a student, but I am already part of the profession.

And if the future of physiotherapy is going to be shaped by young people, then we cannot wait until graduation to start participating in it.

If I were to capture my impression of the youth indaba and symposium, they would be exposure, perspective and possibility. 🌐



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THE *People* BEHIND THE SASP

Martin van Heerden

Most members will recognise the SASP and know some of the work that the Society does, but may not necessarily know the people behind it, what their roles are or how the different leadership structures fit together.

Over the past few months, there have been a number of changes within the National Executive Committee (NEC) because terms have come to an end and members have moved into new roles. It, therefore, seemed like a good time to introduce some of the people behind the SASP, explain a little

more about how the leadership of the Society works, and hear from those who have taken on these roles.

What Are the NEC and PEC?

The NEC is responsible for the overall management of the SASP. It includes the President and Deputy President, together with representatives responsible for Professional Development, the Public Sector, Private Sector, Special Interest Groups, Provincial Groups, Finance, and Communications and Marketing.

The NEC has a fairly broad mandate. Among other things, it determines the policy and strategic direction of the Society, represents the profession nationally and internationally, engages with government on matters affecting physiotherapy, and oversees the governance of the organisation.

Members may also have heard the term PEC, or Presidential Executive Committee. The PEC consists of the President, Deputy President, Finance Coordinator and co-opted members. Its role is more operational. It is there to help ensure that decisions taken by the NEC are implemented appropriately and timeously.

Put simply, the NEC decides on the direction and oversees the Society, while PEC helps make sure that those decisions are carried through.

A Time of Change

The completion of several terms has brought a number of changes to the NEC.

Our previous Deputy President, Monique Koopman, has moved into the role of President, while outgoing President Dr

Natalie Benjamin-Damons remains on the NEC as Deputy President. Prof. Desmond Mathye has been co-opted as the new Financial Committee Chairperson, with Mrs Carine van der Merwe stepping down as Chairperson and continuing as Deputy Chairperson.

Two NEC members have also completed their terms: Prof. Corlia Brandt, who held the Professional Development portfolio, and Mr Martin van Heerden, who held Communications and Marketing. Prof. Marianne Unger joins the NEC and takes over the Professional Development portfolio, while the Communications and Marketing portfolio currently remains vacant.

We would like to thank Prof. Corlia Brandt for her contribution to the NEC and to Professional Development portfolio over the past four years.

A special word of thanks also goes to Carine van der Merwe, who has been an integral part of PEC and has played an important role in managing and overseeing the finances of the Society over the past four years. Her contribution during a period of considerable

Put simply, the NEC decides on the direction and oversees the Society, while PEC helps make sure that those decisions are carried through.

change for the SASP has been invaluable. We are very pleased that her experience is not being lost and that she will continue to support the Financial Committee in the deputy role.

With quite a few familiar faces in new positions, as well as some new

ones joining the team, we asked the people behind these roles to tell us a little more about themselves, their involvement with the SASP and what they hope to contribute over the coming years.

President **Monique Koopman**

What made you say yes to taking on the Presidency?

Honestly, being President of the South African Society of Physiotherapy was never part of my plan. When I completed the coursework component of my Master's in Public Health, I was looking at fellowships in global health systems when a friend reached out and said that the SASP was looking for a Deputy President and that she wanted to nominate me.

I remember being incredibly anxious about the decision and questioning whether this was really where I belonged. However, attending the World Physiotherapy Africa Region Congress in Cape Town in 2024 changed something for me. I had the opportunity to meet the global physiotherapy community and engage in conversations about advocacy, health systems and the role of public health within the physiotherapy context. It made me



truly believe that I was exactly where I was meant to be.

What would you most like the SASP to achieve during your term?

Physiotherapy has such an important role to play beyond the traditional idea of rehabilitation. We have the opportunity to

contribute to prevention, health promotion, strengthening health systems and advocating better access to care. We understand movement, function and participation, but we also see first-hand how social circumstances, access to healthcare and health inequalities affect people’s ability to live well.

I also see so many opportunities within the SASP to become more inclusive, to better understand and meet the needs of our members, to strengthen our advocacy, and, ultimately, to elevate physiotherapy in South Africa.

What do you think is the biggest opportunity for physiotherapy in

Physiotherapy has such an important role to play beyond the traditional idea of rehabilitation.

South Africa right now?

The biggest opportunity for physiotherapy in South Africa right now, for me, is primary healthcare. For too long, physiotherapy has positioned itself predominantly as being there for after an event has happened – after the injury, after the surgery, after someone has already developed disability or



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I believe we need to focus much more on prevention, early intervention and keeping people healthy and functional within their communities. That's probably my public health brain coming through!

What's something members might be surprised to know about you?

Something members might be

surprised to know about me is that I bake novelty cakes. Although, admittedly, the SASP has been keeping me very busy lately, so I haven't had nearly as much opportunity to bake as I would like.

Quick one: When you're not doing physio or SASP work, where will we find you?

You'll probably find me lifting heavy things at the gym early in the morning or spending my weekends with my nephews.

Deputy President
Dr Natalie Benjamin-Damons

Looking back, what are you proudest of from your time as President?

We got through retrenchments without the profession losing its soul. I am also proud about SoMe growth, specialisation groundwork, hosting the World Physiotherapy Africa Region Congress for the SASP's centenary, closing with the 2026 Symposium and launching the Universal Healthcare project to get all healthcare professions properly represented in the NHI.

What did the role teach you?

I learnt about conflict resolution, HR and labour law (something I never signed up for). I also learnt that good governance isn't paperwork. Rather, it's what stops leadership from becoming a popularity contest.



What are you looking forward to about moving into the Deputy President role?

Watching Monique take the reins while I get to have opinions from the sidelines without doing the admin.

Be honest: What won't you miss about being President?

Being the designated adult in every room! Someone has to say the hard thing first, and it was usually me.

FinCom Chairperson
Prof. Desmond Mathye

What made you put your hand up for the NEC?

Over the years, I have heard many physiotherapists speak passionately about the changes they hope to see in our profession. I share those hopes. But I have also come to realise that progress depends on people being willing to do the work. That realisation led me to ask what I could contribute. I could not call for change while leaving the responsibility entirely to others, so I raised my hand to serve and to help build the profession I want to see.

What are you hoping to bring to your portfolio?

I would like to contribute to the responsible management of our finances by ensuring that every transaction delivers value for money. Careful stewardship of our resources could help contain costs

For too long, physiotherapy has positioned itself predominantly as being there for after an event has happened



and, over time, create room to reduce membership fees. Demonstrating that members' contributions are used wisely would also help rebuild the

profession's trust in the organisation and encourage more professionals to join.

What's one thing you'd love the SASP to achieve during your term?

I would like to see our membership grow and, just as importantly, see one or two tangible advances in the profession that we can confidently attribute to SASP's efforts.

Off duty: What do you do when you're not being a physio?

My professional interests extend

progress depends
on people being
willing to do the
work.

beyond physiotherapy to law. Outside my professional work, I enjoy wildlife photography and often visit Kruger National Park to pursue it.

Professional Development Chairperson
Prof. Marianne Unger

What made you put your hand up for the NEC?

I have reached a stage in my career where I feel strongly about giving back to a profession that has given me so much. Having worked across clinical practice, education, research and professional regulation, I have also seen how rapidly physiotherapy is changing. I wanted to contribute to ensuring that the SASP, and particularly professional development, helps physiotherapists navigate that change and remain relevant, confident and responsive to the needs of the communities we serve.

What are you hoping to bring to your portfolio?

I hope to bring together my

experience in physiotherapy education, professional regulation, research and curriculum development, but also a willingness to listen. Professional development should not simply be about accumulating CPD points; it should help us become better practitioners and prepare us for where the profession is going. I would like the PDP to strengthen opportunities for lifelong learning, evidence-informed practice, collaboration between clinicians, academics and our SIGs, and conversations about emerging areas such as extended scope, technology and AI.

What's one thing you'd love the SASP to achieve during your term?

I would love us to strengthen the value that physiotherapists experience from belonging to the SASP. For the PDP specifically, that means creating a more connected and accessible professional-development ecosystem—one where members can readily access relevant learning, evidence and expertise throughout their careers. If, by the end of my term, more physiotherapists see the SASP as a place that genuinely supports their growth and helps them prepare for the future of practice, I would consider that a meaningful achievement.

Off duty: What do you do when you're not being a physio?

I am happiest outdoors and moving! I am a keen cyclist and runner and have completed more Cape Town Cycle Tours and Double Centuries than I probably care to count, as well as the Comrades and Two Oceans marathons. These days I also enjoy hiking, spending time with family

and friends, and generally being active outdoors. After many years in physiotherapy, I still firmly believe that movement is good for you, even when nobody is awarding CPD points for it!



Communications and Marketing
Deputy Chairperson
Martin van Heerden

What are you proudest to have been part of during your time on the NEC?

Making difficult decisions with colleagues and decisions that impact people's livelihood – I'm thinking of permanent staff – as well as the strategic direction of

the society, and being responsible/accountable for what members' money is spent on. Doing all of this while still working, running a business and living normal life has been quite something. I'm proud of being part of a team of similar volunteers who also do the same,

yet make the sacrifices and stand up, even when the decisions that need to be made are uncomfortable and don't lie anywhere within your usual expertise or skill set.

What would you say to someone considering volunteering for SASP?

You will NEVER keep everyone happy. Even the decision that you have deliberated for many hours with your colleagues and believe is the best decision to be made at that time will make someone unhappy. I think remembering your "Why?" is also important, specifically, "Why did you sign up for the role?" That should pull you through the tough times. It's also important to remember that the society will continue without you. It has been around for over 100 years and sometimes you need to step back to allow someone else the opportunity to step up.

I think remembering your "Why?" is also important, specifically, "Why did you sign up for the role?"



Now that NEC meetings are disappearing from your diary, what are you doing with the extra time?

There will be, no doubt, another side-quest to add to an already full plate – I blame late-diagnosed ADHD. Perhaps a PhD? I'll be continuing as the deputy chair of the Communications and Marketing Committee (the Chair position is currently vacant #HintHint #NudgeNudge). There are also a few projects I enjoy being involved in, like compiling the PhysioSA magazine, and I definitely want to focus my energy on finalising the SASP History Book Project. I know the biggest relief of not being on NEC is not having to make major decisions anymore. Decision-fatigue is a real thing! 🌀

BEYOND BORDERS

Leadership, Collaboration and the Future of Physiotherapy

Monique Koopman

In September 2026, I had the privilege of attending the World Physiotherapy Asia Western Pacific (AWP) Regional Congress in New Delhi, India, hosted by the Indian Association of Physiotherapists. With more than 10,000 physiotherapists in attendance, this was a record-breaking congress and an extraordinary celebration of our profession.

From the vibrant colours and cultural performances to the energy of thousands of physiotherapists coming together, India showed that they certainly know how to host a congress. But beyond the scientific programme, the trip became an opportunity to reflect on leadership, governance, international collaboration and the

future of physiotherapy.

All of this started with a conversation about governance.

Sometimes Leadership Begins with Asking for Help

In 2026, World Physiotherapy celebrated its 75th anniversary. As one of its founding member organisations, the South African Society of Physiotherapy (SASP) was invited to attend a special meeting of founding members in Halifax, Canada.

Unfortunately, visa challenges meant that Dr Natalie Benjamin-Damons and I had to participate virtually. While we were grateful to attend, it was difficult to contribute to discussions taking place in the room. More importantly, we missed

the informal conversations and opportunities to network with some of the world's most established physiotherapy associations.

There is simply something irreplaceable about being physically present in a room.

At the time, the SASP was navigating significant succession-planning challenges, particularly around key executive positions. Our National Executive Committee (NEC) and Policy Committee had been exploring possible solutions, including whether individuals who are not physiotherapists, but who possess valuable professional expertise, could serve in certain executive roles.

I reached out to Sylvia Wojciechowski, President of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy in the United

Kingdom, and Dr Rik Dawson, National President of the Australian Physiotherapy Association (APA), to learn from their experiences.

Rik generously met with members of our NEC and Policy Committee to share about how governance works within the APA. These discussions provided valuable insights that our NEC could consider within the South African context.

One thing I am learning in leadership is that we do not need to have all the answers. We do, however, need to be willing to ask for help and learn from others.

An Invitation to India

Following these conversations, Rik invited me to join the Australian delegation at the AWP Regional General Meeting, held alongside the congress in New Delhi.



Although South Africa belongs to the World Physiotherapy Africa region, this was an opportunity to observe another region's governance, learn from other member organisations and strengthen international relationships.

I decided to self-fund the trip as an investment in my own leadership development and, ultimately, because I knew I would be able to bring valuable knowledge and insight back to the SASP. One of the highlights of my time in India was spending mornings

strengthening physiotherapy's role within healthcare systems.

For me, international collaboration should go beyond attending meetings. It should result in meaningful partnerships, knowledge exchange and opportunities that strengthen our profession at home. Equally important is ensuring that African voices and perspectives contribute to shaping the global physiotherapy agenda.

The Future Was in the Room

The congress itself was

One of my favourite initiatives was the content creators' den, where students recorded podcasts and interviewed international delegates.

walking through New Delhi with Mike Landry, President of World Physiotherapy. These walks provided an opportunity for meaningful conversations about South Africa, Africa and the future of our profession.

We reflected on the challenges facing physiotherapy across our continent, from workforce shortages and unequal access to rehabilitation to the sustainability of our professional associations. But we also spoke about the tremendous opportunities for growth and collaboration, as well as

remarkable. Beyond the sheer number of delegates, what stood out most was the energy and enthusiasm of students and early-career physiotherapists.

They were everywhere, and they were engaged, curious, excited and incredibly proud of their profession.

One of my favourite initiatives was the content creators' den, where students recorded podcasts and interviewed international delegates. Instead of simply listening to established



professionals, they were actively contributing to conversations and creating content that extended beyond the congress.

The poster presentations were equally impressive. I have rarely

Are we genuinely including them in shaping that future?

seen poster sessions so well attended. At times, it was difficult to move through the exhibition floor because of the number of people engaging with the research.

It made me reflect on something we often say: students and young professionals are the future of physiotherapy.

But are we genuinely including them in shaping that future?

"Nothing For Us Without Us."

If students and early-career professionals will inherit the profession we are building today,

they deserve to be part of the conversations and decisions shaping it, and they need to be active contributors.

This is particularly relevant to the SASP as we strengthen our leadership pipeline. Our recent leadership bootcamp, *Lead Where You Are*, attracted 69 participants. Many expressed an interest in leadership but questioned whether they had the necessary skills or whether they belonged in

Our responsibility is to equip, mentor and create room for them

begin only when a position becomes vacant.

Bringing the learning home

I returned from India with new relationships, fresh perspectives



leadership at all.

To me, those 69 participants represent an incredible opportunity. They are people who want to contribute. Our responsibility is to equip, mentor and create room for them to develop and enter those leadership spaces.

Leadership development cannot

and renewed motivation.

The experience reinforced the importance of strong governance, intentional succession planning, investing in emerging leaders and building international partnerships that create meaningful opportunities for our members.

It also reminded me that South Africa and Africa have much to

contribute to the global physiotherapy community. While our challenges may differ from those of larger, better-resourced associations, our experiences, innovations and perspectives are equally valuable.

As I continue my journey as SASP President, I am reminded that leadership is not about having all the answers or being the most knowledgeable person in the room. It is about being willing to learn, surrounding yourself with people who bring different skills, opening doors for others and building something that will outlast your own term.

Sometimes that means reaching out to a colleague on the other side of the world. Sometimes it means investing in your own development. And sometimes it means recognising that the most important voices in the room may belong to those just beginning their professional journeys.

We cannot build the future of physiotherapy without the people who will inherit it.

And if India taught me anything, it is that our future is full of possibility. 🌍



Leading with *Purpose*

Volunteering into the Role of Chair of the Private Sector Group

Lizl Van Heerden

Accepting the role of chair of a committee has been both an honour and a responsibility for me. Many people picture this position as one of authority and influence, but I've found the reality is quite different. The position of chairing is about service, not status or recognition, and there is a great responsibility that comes with being entrusted with guiding the committee, supporting its members and leaving it stronger than you found it.

One of the biggest misconceptions I held about becoming a chair was that leadership starts the moment you're elected. In truth, that's when the real learning curve begins. No course, title or past experience can fully prepare you for the privilege of leading like-minded committee volunteers who each bring their perspectives, expectations and expertise to the table. As such, I've come



to see leadership as an ongoing journey of growth.

The first lesson I learned was that you don't need to have all the answers. Believing otherwise can become one of the biggest obstacles to effective leadership. I have come to realise that better results are achieved by asking questions, listening carefully, staying curious and trusting the wisdom often lies in the collective experience of the team.

Another important lesson I learnt is the value of honesty in a leadership

members than one built on the appearance of having everything under control. Members can sense authenticity, and they respond to it with loyalty and goodwill. For me, honesty isn't just a value to hold quietly it's a practice you try to model in every meeting, decision and conversation.

I've also learned that leadership isn't about restructuring everything simply because you have new ideas. You have to respect the foundations others have built and thoughtfully identify opportunities for improvement.



leadership isn't about restructuring everything simply because you have new ideas.

role. I can say that I have striven to be honest with myself, with my committee and with the members I serve. It meant acknowledging when a decision had not worked out as planned, being transparent about the choices we made and admitting that I don't have all the answers rather than pretending otherwise.

Honesty also means giving people the truth even when it's uncomfortable and being willing to receive it in return. A committee built on honest communication earns far more trust from its

Meaningful change grows from understanding, not simply from what we think is needed.

Before you can lead a committee effectively, you must first understand how it functions. Every committee has its own history, culture, traditions and identity. Furthermore, it takes time to understand the values, challenges, needs, and expectations of its members, as well as what they hope the committee can achieve on their behalf.

As both a practice owner and a

volunteer, I've found that these two roles continually complement each other. The challenges I have experienced in private practice, and the lessons I have gained through navigating them have equipped me for this role. It has given me practical firsthand insight into the realities of private practice and the challenges our members face.

At the same time, leading a committee has taught me to listen to different perspectives, find common ground, and make responsible decisions that consider

and has the opportunity to contribute.

At its heart, volunteering is about serving others and contributing to something bigger than yourself. Of course, it requires time and energy, but it also gives back in ways that are difficult to measure. I have learnt many lessons and have built character through the experience, one of the most important ones being managing my time and balancing the various aspects of my life.

You have to make time for what

volunteering is about serving others and contributing to something bigger than yourself

the needs of our members, while recognising that the decisions we make today can shape the future of our profession.

Making decisions in a committee has taught me the importance of deep collaboration and considering the wider consequences of each decision for our members. The best ideas emerge when people feel comfortable speaking up and sharing different perspectives. Thus, as Chair, my role is not to have all the answers, but to create a space where everyone feels heard

matters, but that doesn't mean being available at every second of the day. You simply cannot do everything alone. I've learned that healthy boundaries, delegation and trusting my committee creates space for others to grow. Leadership should never rest on one person, but on a strong committee that shares responsibility and empowers leadership.

One of the greatest privileges of serving as Chair has been seeing others grow; discovering their strengths, taking ownership and

becoming confident leaders.

Ultimately, I don't own the committee. I'm entrusted with it for a season. As such, my role is to uphold its values, support its members and encourage new ideas.

I believe that leadership isn't about being out front, it's about supporting others and helping them reach their potential. Lead with humility and a genuine desire

to serve, and you leave a lasting legacy.

If you're considering a volunteer role, step forward. You don't need all the answers or years of experience, just a willingness to serve. You'll discover how much you can contribute and how much you can grow. Your voice matters.

Step up, contribute and make a difference. 



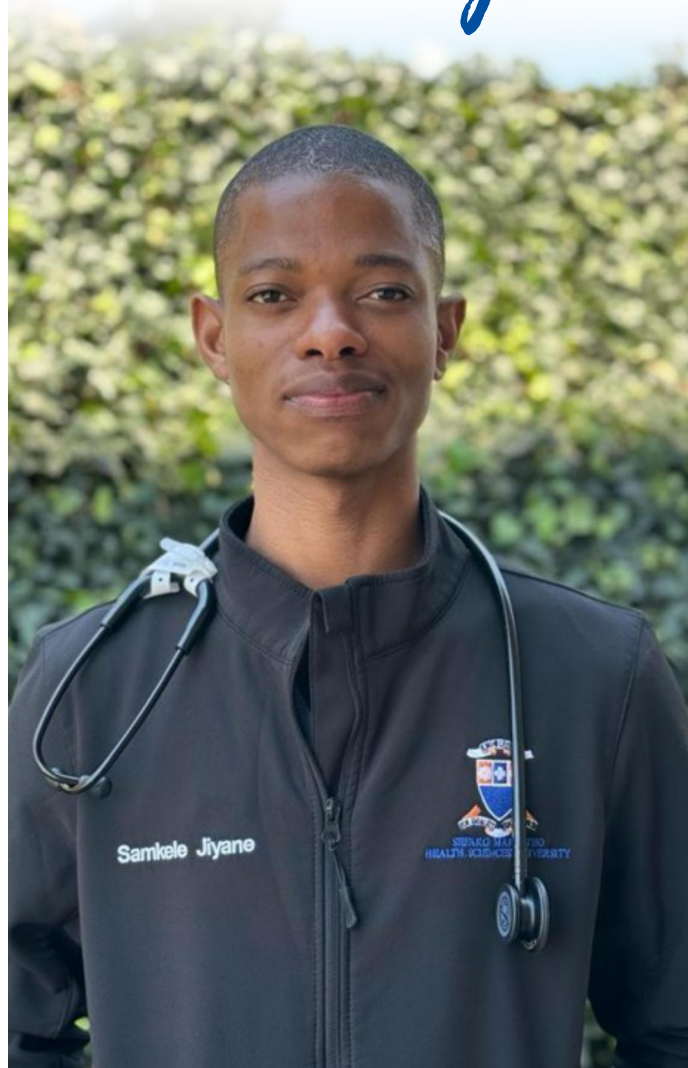
FROM THE RURAL WARD TO A VISION FOR CHANGE

My Journey as a Community Service Physiotherapist

Samkele Jiyane

My time at Appelsbosch District Hospital in KwaZulu-Natal has been a journey of witnessing vulnerability and discovering resilience. Along the way, I've learnt that physiotherapy can become a powerful bridge between illness and hope.

Working as a Community Service Physiotherapist in a remote rural area has challenged me in ways that textbooks never could. In a rural hospital, you quickly learn that rehabilitation does not happen in isolation. It happens within families, communities and circumstances shaped by distance, poverty, limited resources and restricted access to specialised services.



Every patient arrives with more than a diagnosis; they arrive with a story, a family and a future that is waiting to be rebuilt.

Some of the most profound experiences of my journey have been with children.

I have encountered children living with severe acute malnutrition whose small bodies reflected the immense challenges they and their families were facing. At first, their stories were difficult to witness.

Their weakness, limited energy and vulnerability reminded me of how easily childhood can be interrupted by circumstances beyond a child's control.

Yet practising physiotherapy in this context taught me to look beyond

the illness and see possibility. A small movement, an improved ability to sit or a caregiver learning how to safely position and stimulate their child became victories. A child lifting his head for the first time, a mother smiling because her daughter has sat independently for the first time, and a caregiver leaving hospital confident that she can continue rehabilitation at home are the small successes that make everything worthwhile.

They might not be dramatic victories, but they are victories nonetheless, and ones I look forward to and savour.

I have come across children living with hydrocephalus. These



experiences taught me that rehabilitation is not only about movement; it is about helping a child reclaim opportunities for development and participation.

Behind every diagnosis was a family trying to understand what was happening to their child, often with limited access to information and specialist services. Physiotherapy became an opportunity to educate, reassure and empower these people. I began to understand that when we teach a caregiver how to position, handle, stimulate and support a child, we are extending the reach of physiotherapy far beyond the hospital walls.

Then there were children living with cerebral palsy. Cerebral palsy showed me the long-term nature of rehabilitation and the importance of seeing the child beyond their impairment. A child who struggles to walk is not simply a child with poor mobility. They are a child who wants to play, attend school, interact with friends, participate in family life and experience independence. My role became more than improving strength or movement and became about creating opportunities for participation – helping them gain life and independence.

I saw sorrow gradually become determination. I saw frustration become confidence. I saw limitations become adaptations. I saw caregivers who had once felt

helpless become active partners in their child's rehabilitation.

These moments changed my understanding of what it means to be a physiotherapist. Physiotherapy, I discovered, is about restoring possibility.

Appelsbosch also exposed me to another reality: the burden of stroke in rural communities. Seeing patients living with the consequences of a stroke, often while facing significant barriers to rehabilitation and follow-up, made me question what happens after the hospital discharge. What happens when a stroke survivor returns to a community where rehabilitation services are limited? What happens to the family member who suddenly becomes a



caregiver? What happens when the person who once supported the family now depends on the family for everyday activities?

These questions remain with me. They have shaped my developing interest in stroke rehabilitation and influenced the direction of my master's research. I became increasingly interested in understanding what happens beyond the hospital. My experiences in a rural setting helped me recognise that rehabilitation cannot be viewed only through the hospital lens. The



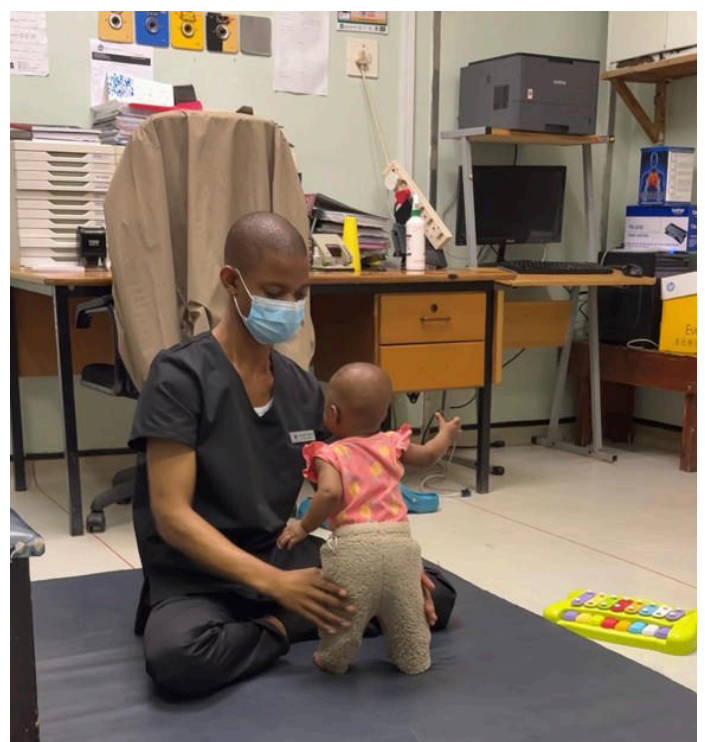
Physiotherapy, I discovered, is about restoring possibility.

which families had a limited understanding of their child's condition, rehabilitation needs and what they could do at home to support development. I also recognised the challenges that future community service therapists may face when they are

real test of rehabilitation is whether it remains meaningful when the patient returns home.

The rural environment therefore became more than a place where I worked. It became a place where I learned to ask better research questions. At the same time, my paediatric experiences revealed another gap that was equally important: the knowledge and support available to families caring for vulnerable children in remote communities.

I encountered many situations in



placed in remote facilities and expected to manage complex paediatric conditions with limited resources, limited mentorship and limited access to specialised services.

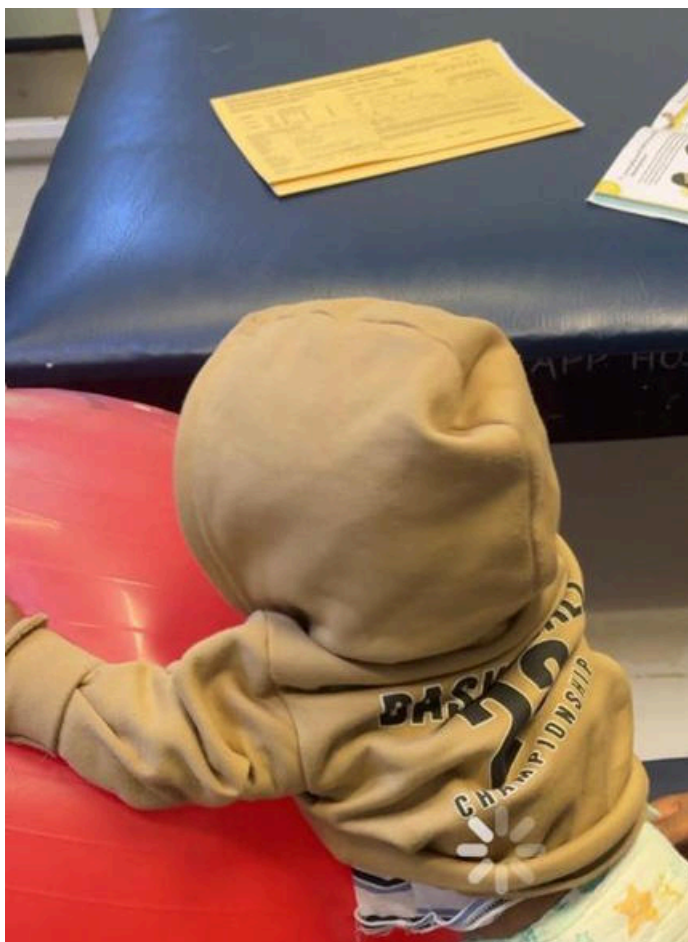
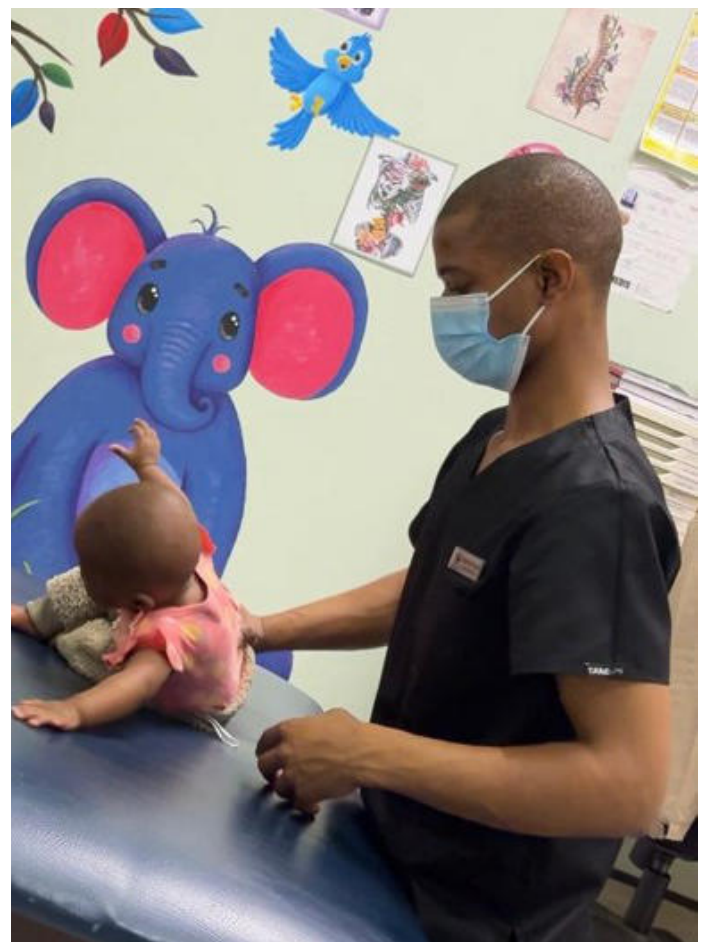
This realisation has contributed to my current research collaboration with Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University. The purpose is not simply to describe the problems. It is to seek solutions. I want future community service therapists working in remote areas to be better prepared to care for premature babies and children with complex neurological and developmental conditions. I want them to have practical knowledge, appropriate guidance, stronger referral pathways and strategies

that can work within the realities of rural communities.

I have come to understand that research is about more than producing a thesis, and that it should really return to the community that inspired it. Additionally, it should influence practice and strengthen the positions of clinicians. It should also empower families, and, ultimately, it should improve the lives of children.

My journey at Appelsbosch has, therefore, been a journey from witnessing sorrow to discovering moments of victory.

My experiences have taught me that physiotherapy is sometimes



about inches rather than kilometres and moments rather than milestones. I've also learnt the importance of hope, and discovered that in a remote rural hospital, you may not always have the equipment, specialist teams or resources you wish you had, but you can still bring knowledge.

You can also bring compassion, teach, listen and empower others as you, yourself adapt. And sometimes, that is where transformation begins.

My Community Service year has not simply prepared me to become a better physiotherapist. It has given me a reason to become a better researcher, educator and advocate for rehabilitation.

Appelsbosch has shown me the problems the people and physiotherapists of our nation face in the rural areas. The patients have revealed to me the purpose of what I am doing, and research is giving me a pathway towards solutions.

My vision is that no child born in a remote area should have their potential limited simply because specialised rehabilitation is far away. Every child deserves the opportunity to move, develop, participate and dream.

That is the lesson Appelsbosch has given me: physiotherapy does not only change movement; it can change the trajectory of a young life. 🌍

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REFLECTING ON MODULE 3 OF MEN'S PELVIC HEALTH

MATTHEW AUCAMP

I recently had the privilege of attending Modules 1 and 2 in Men's Pelvic Health, and I was excited to return for Module 3, which focusses specifically on pelvic pain. I found the course to be an incredibly valuable experience, and it has contributed significantly to my growth as a physiotherapist.

What makes the module so valuable is that pelvic pain in men can be complex and is often a sensitive area to assess and treat. The module gave me a much deeper understanding of the different factors that can contribute to pelvic pain, while also providing practical tools and techniques that I can apply in my clinical practice. More importantly, it pushed me outside of my usual comfort zone. It gave me greater

insight into the experiences of men who eventually reach the point of seeking help, something that I think is important for any healthcare professional to appreciate.

One of my biggest takeaways was the importance of looking beyond the pelvic floor itself. Pain experienced around the pelvis does not necessarily originate from the pelvic floor. Myofascial pain and trigger points in surrounding muscles can contribute significantly to the symptoms in our patients. Structures such as the adductor group, psoas and other muscles around the hip and pelvis can all play a role and are therefore worth considering during assessment.

The course also highlighted the importance of the sacrum and coccyx region and, perhaps more importantly, the role of breathing. The diaphragm and pelvic floor work as part of a pressure-management and movement system, and understanding this synergy can provide valuable insight into how a patient is moving, breathing and managing intra-abdominal pressure. Something as seemingly simple as observing a patient's breathing pattern can therefore provide useful information when assessing

someone with pelvic, abdominal, hip or lower-back symptoms.

For physiotherapists who don't routinely work in pelvic health, I think this is an important clinical reminder:

When a patient presents with pain around the pelvis, groin, hip or lower back, we shouldn't necessarily assume the painful area is the source. The surrounding myofascial structures should be observed, including the adductors and psoas, and the sacral and



“The module gave me a much deeper understanding of the different factors that can contribute to pelvic pain, while also providing practical tools and techniques that I can apply in my clinical practice”

coccyx region should be assessed where appropriate. Additionally, we should take a moment to observe how the patient breathes and moves. Sometimes broadening the assessment can reveal contributing factors that may otherwise be missed.

Another highlight was the sense of community I experienced. It is encouraging to see how the South African Society of Physiotherapy (SASP) and the wider physiotherapy community continue to support education, training and the development of our profession. Dina-Marie and Johann were brilliant presenters who shared their knowledge, experience and wisdom generously. Their approachability made it easy to ask questions, discuss challenging cases and learn from one another.

There were, of course, plenty of laughs and jokes throughout the course! In a subject that can sometimes feel quite sensitive or uncomfortable to discuss, that light-hearted atmosphere helped create a relaxed and supportive learning environment. It reminded

me that good education doesn't always have to be serious, and that sometimes a bit of humour helps us feel comfortable enough to ask the questions we might otherwise be hesitant to ask.

Perhaps one of the greatest benefits of attending courses like this is the opportunity to connect with other physiotherapists. Being able to network, brainstorm clinical problems and share experiences remind us that we do not work in isolation. It was reassuring to see how clinicians in this field look out for and support one another.

I left Module 3 with more knowledge, more practical tools and, perhaps most importantly, a greater appreciation for the men who experience pelvic pain and the courage it can take to ask for help. It was another reminder that continuing education is not simply about adding techniques to our toolbox, it is about broadening the way we think, improving our clinical reasoning and ultimately becoming better clinicians for the people who trust us with their care. 

BUILDING FUTURES THROUGH REHABILITATION

Electra Barbas

For Rehabilitation Awareness Week 2026, our rehabilitation team decided to shine a light on something we had been noticing within our facility for a while: developmental delay in young children.

We have been seeing children referred for rehabilitation at around 2 years old, sometimes with significant delays in milestones such as sitting, standing and walking, communicating and even play. We wanted to use Rehabilitation Week as an opportunity to create awareness around child development and show how rehabilitation can help build a child's future.

After our proposal was approved by our Clinical Manager, we got to work creating an interactive campaign where people could learn through doing. Instead of simply handing out information, we



designed fun activities around different areas of development. Participants were challenged with balance and coordination activities, fine-motor tasks and communication games that demonstrated that communication is so much more than just speaking. Each activity was linked to a developmental skill, helping participants understand how important these skills are in everyday life.

The campaign also allowed us to show the different roles within rehabilitation. Physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy each contribute in unique ways to a child's development and seeing how these professions work together highlighted just how valuable a multidisciplinary approach can be.

As the only physiotherapist at our facility, I had noticed that children with developmental delay had not traditionally been referred to physiotherapy at our community service facility. This campaign was, therefore, particularly meaningful in highlighting the important role physiotherapy can play in supporting movement, reaching developmental milestones and facilitating participation in children with developmental difficulties.

Most importantly, the campaign reminded us that rehabilitation is about more than treating a condition. It's about developing skills and enabling independence, both in children and adults. We believe that by creating awareness today, we can help build brighter futures, one milestone at a time. 



MOVEMENT FOR HEALTH DAY

MARION DAWSON

The Move for Health Day is aimed at creating public awareness about the benefits of physical activity and helping prevent non-communicable diseases through promoting active, healthy lifestyles.

This year's Move for Health Day talk was on the importance of strength training.

To complement the talk, we also held balance and strength training exercises with dumbbells, therabands, yoga balls and balance boards.





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