

## Physical activity at the core of the profession – and the congress

**A major theme running through the forthcoming International WCPT Congress in Amsterdam is physical activity. At the core of everything physical therapists do, the subject also permeates a wide variety of congress sessions and activities. Simon Crompton examines how.**

“There will be – quite rightly – a focus at the congress on activity and health, and activity as a means of reducing disability and promoting participation,” says David Baxter from New Zealand, who will be one of those contributing to a congress session on how to monitor physical activity levels among clinical populations.

“Physical activity sits at the core of the profession,” he says. “Evidence supports the fact that such interventions can be highly effective in a variety of conditions, but they are – at least in my view – under-utilised.”

Delegates attending the congress in Amsterdam next June will have a wide range of sessions to select from to suit their needs best. The main congress programme is being dovetailed with related activities so that delegates can combine scientific sessions, such as focused symposia and discussion sessions, with practical courses and clinical visits within their area of interest. The theme of physical activity and health will be reflected in all the programme elements.

Baxter, who is Dean of the School of Physiotherapy at the University of Otago, New Zealand, will be contributing to an education session called “Physical Activity for Clinical Populations: measurement and interventions”. This will be part of the congress satellite programme which occurs just before the main congress. It has been developed by Suzanne McDonough from the University of Ulster, in the UK.

“We have been collectively working as an international research network focussing on physical activity as an intervention for a variety of clinical populations, including low back pain,” says David Baxter. “One of the core themes of our research to date has been the use of activity monitors (sophisticated pedometers) in free living to assess levels and changes of activity over time. Colleagues are also interested in pedometers as a means to increase walking in clinical populations, and novel devices for monitoring activity during sleep.”

“Our main aim with the session is to provide an introduction to the use of such devices in routine clinical practice, firstly using these as a means of objectively monitoring activity, and secondly – and perhaps more importantly – to review the current evidence for these devices

when used as part of interventions. Clinical areas we plan to cover include low back pain, respiratory and cardiovascular disease, and sleep studies.”

There will be other education sessions within the satellite programme, covering promoting healthy lifestyles to reduce the disease burden, and physical fitness testing and training for older people. The theme of activity and health will be reflected in a range of sessions within the main congress programme too: for example, in the newly-announced discussion panel sessions, WCPT President Marilyn Moffat will be chairing a session on “Evidence based exercise prescription: raising the standard of delivery”.

A number of focused symposia (the showpiece events of the main programme which draw together a group of major figures to examine the latest advances on an important theme) will look at several angles on physical activity, including exercise and cancer, fitness and physical activity in cerebral palsy and global physical activity challenges.

Rik Gosselink from Belgium will be one of the main speakers at a focused symposium entitled “Early Physical Exercise and Walking in ICU: accept the challenge!” The symposium will focus on the management of critically ill patients and examine how evidence now demonstrates that physical activity is beneficial at the very earliest stages of recovery – even exercising patients passively when they are still on a ventilator.

“In the past, we waited until patients were stable, and could cooperate,” says Gosselink, who is full Professor of Respiratory Rehabilitation Sciences at the Faculty of Kinesiology and Rehabilitation Sciences, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium. “Nowadays, we exercise them passively, sometimes using forms of stimulation such as electrotherapy.”

“We’re now seeing physical therapists’ involvement in promoting physical activity is widening. At one end of the scale we have patients who are very ill. Then we are working with people who are inactive for long periods because of chronic disease. And at the other end of the scale we are working with active younger people who are achieving at the highest levels of competition. It’s the full scale of improving physical fitness.”

The International Scientific Committee planned the programme so that these sessions would appeal to a large number of delegates – physical activity was one of the topics identified from market research undertaken across the profession before planning started.