In Tribute: Janet H. Carr

Janet H. Carr, DipPhy, MA, MEd, EdD, Fellow of the Australian College of Physiotherapists, died on November 4, 2014. Editorial Board Member Chris Maher, who informed me of her death, stated that “she was an absolute giant in the physiotherapy field in Australia and influenced many generations of physiotherapists. With her collaborator, Roberta Shepherd, she was probably the first Australian physiotherapist to systematically apply science to practice.”

James Gordon, the 45th Mary McMillan lecturer and a student at Columbia Teachers College with Carr, said that Janet “was an extraordinary physiotherapist who, along with Roberta [Shepherd], advanced the practice of neurological rehabilitation. She had vision that the science of motor control and motor learning could be translated to better ways to treat patients.”

To understand why Maher and Gordon are making these accolades, allow me to introduce you to Janet Carr. She began practice in 1959 and gained clinical expertise in Sydney; London, Ontario; and Switzerland. She became an academic tutor in 1970 and went on to become a lecturer, senior lecturer, associate professor, and honorary associate professor at Cumberland College of Health Sciences and the University of Sydney. While mentoring physical therapist students in the classroom and the clinic, she earned a master of arts degree in 1984 and a master’s degree and a doctoral degree in education in 1987 and 1991, respectively.

Carr began to share her clinical approach to treating patients with neuromuscular diagnoses in 1982 in a textbook coauthored with Shepherd titled A Motor Relearning Programme for Stroke.1 But the textbook for which she is the most well-known—also coauthored with Shepherd—is Neurological Rehabilitation: Optimizing Motor Performance2 and has been translated into Chinese, Portuguese, Japanese, Korean, Greek, Farsi, and Arabic. Carr published numerous peer-reviewed articles, presented research findings at national and international meetings, received grants to conduct research, and was invited to present her research findings—and their importance to clinical practice—around the world. One of her research reports, “Investigation of a New Motor Assessment Scale for Stroke Patients,”3 published in PTJ in 1985, is one of the top 10 highly cited PTJ articles to date according to Web of Science. Carr also served as president of the Australian College of Physiotherapists from 1989 to 1995 and received numerous awards and honors.

When I was a student learning how to treat people with neuromuscular disorders, the interventions were primarily passive. Carr and Shepherd embraced neuroscience findings on motor control and motor learning and emphasized the relevance of those findings in transforming clinical practice and adopting a new approach. They were successful in knowledge translation and helped to change care for people with neuromuscular disorders. Many would agree that they were pioneers in guiding faculty and clinicians in the evidence-based practice concepts that are used today.
But Carr was more than a visionary for new modes of practice, more than a pioneer in promoting evidence-based practice. She was, and continues to be, a role model. She was a clinician who saw the need to return to an academic setting to acquire additional knowledge and skills so that she could engage in research to determine whether her clinical presumptions would be supported by scientific rigor.

I had the privilege of meeting this wonderful lady when she was a doctoral student at Columbia Teachers College. She inspired me then, and the incredible contribution that she has made in transforming clinical practice continues to inspire me. Thank you, Dr Janet Carr, for helping to show us how passion, rigor, and persistence can lead to a recovery of function and improved quality of life for the patients and clients whom we serve.

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References


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