

## Rehabilitation Medicine

### Dear Editor,

I congratulate Dr Kong Keng He and his fellow authors on their excellent special edition on Rehabilitation Medicine and the Rehabilitation Physician published last year.<sup>1</sup>

In Australia, we have generally good programmes for the various aspects of Rehabilitation Medicine. Cases are referred to us by general practitioners or other medical specialists, insurance companies, lawyers and Workers' Compensation authorities. However, we still have only a few units or clinics with special reference to Occupational Medicine. Occupational Rehabilitation aims at the restoration of fitness for work after the occurrence of disability. It involves an assessment of the person's physical or mental ability, often a worksite visit, and liaison with the person and his/her supervisor and family in the planning and implementation of alternative duties and graduated return to full duties. Where return to the original work is not feasible, returning to another suitable job, including job trials and placements, is undertaken. Severely disabled workers are placed in sheltered workshops.<sup>2</sup>

In the Westmead Hospital, we started a special clinic on that subject in the late 1980s. I have been involved since 1988. Assisting me is usually a Rehabilitation Registrar or a trainee on a rotation basis. We have close cooperation with the CRS (formerly the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service), which helps us with vocational assessment and the re-training of injured or diseased workers unable to resume their previous employment. Occupational therapists visit the potential worksites to ensure that the job demands are within the capacity of the rehabilitated worker. Clinical psychologists, physiotherapists and Chronic Pain specialists work closely in conjunction with us. A vital key to successful rehabilitation of injured or diseased workers is the support or otherwise of their supervisors, family, fellow-workers and general practitioner. Some general practitioners tend to give sick leave or prescribe painkillers rather than initiate a prompt and comprehensive rehabilitation programme. We find that about half the injured or diseased workers who have not returned to work within 6 months to

their previous or modified or alternative employment would never do so.<sup>3</sup>

Rehabilitation has for a long time been recognised as an important element in the training of occupational physicians.<sup>4</sup> In Australia, the usual qualification for a rehabilitation physician is a 4-year training programme and an exit examination for the Fellowship of the Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians. For an occupational physician, the equivalent training and examination for the Fellowship of Occupational and Environmental Medicine of the same College pertains. Both kinds of specialists need to understand more of either discipline.<sup>5</sup> The necessity for collaboration is emphasised by the joint conference held in May of this year between the two Faculties, at which many subjects of mutual interest were discussed.

### REFERENCES

1. Rehabilitation Medicine. *Ann Acad Med Singapore* 2007;36:1-88.
2. Phoon WO. Rehabilitation. In: Phoon WO, Parekh R, editors. *Occupational and Environmental Health: a Practical Manual*. Mumbai: Bhalani Medical Book House, 2007.
3. Marosszeky J. Occupational Rehabilitation. *Proceedings of the 24<sup>th</sup> International Congress in Occupational Health*; Nice, 1992.
4. Guidance Note for the Development of Tertiary Level Courses for Professional Education in Occupational and Safety (Report of Steering Committee/Chairman Phoon Wai On). Australia: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1994.
5. Phoon WO. Education and training in occupational and environment health. *Int J Environ Manage Health* 1997;8:158-61.

Wai-On Phoon,<sup>1</sup>*FAMS, FRCP, FAFRM*

<sup>1</sup> Consultant Physician-in-charge, Occupational Rehabilitation  
Westmead Hospital, Australia

Address for Correspondence: Emeritus Professor Phoon Wai-On, Westmead Hospital, P.O. Box 818, Pymble, New South Wales, Australia.