

ANIMAL REHABILITATION

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

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REFLECTIONS ON THE EVOLUTION OF ANIMAL REHABILITATION

Recently I was confronted with a rather interesting question of current relevance. In fact the question was so compelling it prompted me to reflect on the current state of physical therapy practice and animal rehabilitation. I was asked by a physical therapist, who does not treat animals by trade, if I was personally concerned that animals were not represented or even implied as part of scope of practice in the newly proposed APTA 2020 Vision Statement slated for debate during the 2013 House of Delegates. After mulling it over for a while, I offered the following commentary based on my perspective of current practice.

I do not believe the number of physical therapists (PTs) and physical therapist assistants (PTAs) treating animals on a national scale has achieved a high enough critical mass at this point in time to even be considered as part of the new Vision Statement. In fact I would surmise that a good majority of APTA members might even protest any motion to include animals as part of the new vision. That may change in the future, but for now it is the current state of affairs even though physical therapists have been treating animals in the United States as far back as the 1970s and most likely in prior decades as well to some degree. Ann Downer, a PT faculty member in the Physical Therapy program at The Ohio State University, no doubt raised a few eyebrows with the publication of her revolutionary book published in 1978 entitled, *Physical Therapy for Animals: Selected Techniques*. Although basic in premise, Downer's book provided sound advice on indications and contraindications for a variety of physical agents still in use today.

The profession of physical therapy has advanced a great deal since the 70s in terms of skill development in clinical reasoning and manual therapy techniques, but the evolution of animal rehabilitation in the United States remains relatively low at best. Within the professional association, there are two primary levels of recognition: (1) An APTA position statement that supports PTs forming relationships with veterinarians, and (2) The Animal Rehabilitation Special Interest Group, serving under the guidance of the APTA Orthopaedic Section, also providing support for PTs and PTAs who treat animals. Neither level of recognition however is significant enough at this point in time to warrant inclusion in the APTA Vision Statement. So there you have it...the omission of animals in the proposed APTA Vision Statement therefore does not bother me only because I am fully cognizant and accepting of the current environment within the association and within our profession as a whole related to animal rehab. But we as a collective group of therapists who carry a bonded interest in the animal kingdom, also possess the power of influence to change perceptions so maybe in another 5, 10, or even 15 years, the environment of rehabilitation will be viewed through a different lens.

So why do I share this personal reflection? Simply put, good

leadership of any organization should on occasion provide members with some level of philosophical meanderings with the intent to educate and potentially motivate others toward action. So consider what I just said, and regardless of whether you agree or disagree, please keep in mind that the ARSIG represents a unique group of therapists who are true pioneers in the profession...and we are still blazing new trails for others to follow. This level of responsibility is both a privilege and an honor, and yet its future hinges on your personal perspective and integrity as practitioners, educators, and scholars.

ARSIG LEGISLATIVE LIAISON: ROLE & RESPONSIBILITIES

Another topic that I must continue to *bound* (pun intended) is the dire need for the ARSIG to update and educate on the role of a Legislative Liaison. The basic role of a Legislative Liaison serving the SIG is to monitor all legislative and regulatory happenings related to animal rehab from both the PT and veterinary perspectives, and be responsive to taking action when issues of concern arise. Of course this requires knowledge of how legislative and regulatory processes work in respective states, but as PTs and PTAs we are already accountable to know our own laws and regulations in order to be licensed, so I am simply asking designated liaisons to start tracking agendas, and reading the minutes from veterinary and PT board meetings as a starting point. In the majority of states, the process of tracking political activities has been streamlined with use of online technology so it requires little time and effort once you catch on. You might also be surprised to learn how many communications are happening in other professions related to animal rehab as well, *eg, check out Occupational Therapists, Massage Therapists, Chiropractors, and Athletic Trainers*.

What is most important, however, is for leaders of the ARSIG to remain 'in the know' regarding key political happenings in other states if the organization is to fulfill one of its primary functions of lending support to colleagues when needed. This is how the APTA serves its members on a national level, and it is how state chapter associations serve their members on a state by state level. The ARSIG needs to also act with some level of homogeneity if it is to gain greater notoriety, and maybe someday become even more explicitly recognized within the profession.

IMPORTANT UPDATES The California Saga

The California Veterinary Medical Board (VMB) met in April and unfortunately voted to retain the direct supervision requirement. So now the issue will move to a public hearing tentatively scheduled for January 2014. If Vet Board members cannot be convinced to alter their position on supervision in January, then PTs in California will lose a great deal of privilege they have enjoyed for many years. *This is a very serious issue my fellow colleagues*, and I am not sure how else to get that point across beyond the use of the written language. With that said,

I urge our good friends in California to please review the language on direct supervision and the CA Vet Board agendas and meeting minutes as they become public. These documents are available at the following Web site: http://www.vmb.ca.gov/about_us/meetings.shtml. As ARSIG President, I have been in communications with individuals in California from both PT and Vet perspectives so I am abreast of the issues involved, and they are complex to say the least.

ARSIG WEB SITE:

The glitch with the ARSIG member directory, available on the SIG Web site, has been fixed. The list of current SIG members should now be accurate and serves as a nice resource for members seeking contact information about colleagues located across the country.

MASTER LIST OF ARSIG LEGISLATIVE LIAISONS:

Tanya, Robyn, and I continue our efforts to update the ARSIG Legislative Liaison list. However, we still need individuals from some states to serve as volunteer state liaisons. In the near future I will post (for members only) a spreadsheet that lists all current state liaisons. This will help members identify the missing slots needing to be filled to achieve a goal of 50 liaisons for 50 states. Of course a few states are currently void of any PTs or PTAs practicing on animals, but I assume that statistic will eventually change as the profession continues to evolve.

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