Listing on MEDLINE:
A new milestone for the Australian Journal of Physiotherapy

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The Editorial Board is pleased to announce that, commencing with the first issue of Volume 47, the Australian Journal of Physiotherapy will now be listed in the prestigious MEDLINE database. It has long been a goal of past and current Editorial Boards to achieve listing with MEDLINE because of the international exposure that such listing brings. Of the estimated 13,000 to 14,000 biomedical titles currently published throughout the world, about 4,500 titles are indexed and included in the MEDLINE database. MEDLINE is the principal online bibliographic citation database of MEDLARS system of the National Library of Medicine (USA) and includes all the citations published in Index Medicus as well as the citations published in two other indices, the Index to Dental Literature (IDL) and the International Nursing Index (INI).

The decision whether or not to index a journal is made by the Director of the National Library of Medicine, based on a recommendation by the Literature Selection Technical Review Committee (LSTRC). This body was established to review journal titles and assess the quality of their contents in terms of scientific policy and scientific quality. The LSTRC meets three times per year and generally reviews around 140 journals at each meeting. Overall, about 15-20% of the titles reviewed are selected for indexing. It is important to note that there is no guarantee that a journal will be listed indefinitely. On the basis of regular reviews, currently indexed titles may be dropped.

On what criteria is a journal deemed worthy of inclusion? Some of the critical elements are:

1. Scope and coverage: The emphasis is on core biomedical subjects.
2. Quality of content: The primary consideration in selecting journals for indexing is the scientific merit of a journal's content.
3. Quality of editorial work: This refers to features contributing to the objectivity, credibility, and quality of a journal's contents, eg reference to the explicit process of external peer review; statements indicating adherence to ethical guidelines; opportunity for comments and dissenting opinion.
4. Production quality: The quality of the layout, printing, graphics, and illustrations.
5. Audience: MEDLINE and Index Medicus are intended primarily for those in the health professions, including allied health professionals.
6. Types of content: The inclusion of original research papers in a journal implies unique contributions to the field and is therefore more likely to lead to a journal's inclusion for listing.

As was the case with past Editorial Boards, one of the major objectives of the current Board has been to increase international exposure and recognition of the Australian journal. To this end, it has undertaken some major changes to the publication over the last few years. In general, there has been a favourable response to the "new look" of the Journal following the redesign undertaken at the end of 1998. Each year the number of non-commissioned manuscripts submitted to the Journal has increased and a substantial number (around 25%) have been from overseas contributors. There has been a steady increase in circulation figures, with subscribers from 42 countries. In fact, nearly 90% of non-member subscriptions are international. An Editorial Advisory Panel, made up of distinguished international authors, was recruited to raise the international profile of the Journal by assisting with manuscript reviews as well as the submission of papers of interest. Mindful of feedback from readers requesting information with direct clinical relevance, the Editorial Board introduced Critically Appraised Papers (CAPs), designed to give readers of the Journal rapid access to advances in the diagnosis, prevention, treatment and prognosis of conditions managed by physiotherapists. The CAPs comprise structured abstracts, principally of randomised controlled trials, followed by a brief commentary from an expert in the field.

Last year the Journal was listed on the influential Science Citation Index Expanded. This database, maintained by the US-based Institute for Scientific Information (ISI), indexes 5,300 major journals across 164 scientific disciplines. This listing ensures that the Journal will be included in the impact factor calculations that are published regularly by ISI. The journal rankings provided are based upon several measurements, including the number of articles published in the year, and how frequently articles published in each journal are cited in the year. Authors may also use the Science Citation Index to find out how many times an article or author has been cited. The next major goal of the Editorial Board is to have the Journal published on-line and we are currently awaiting the decision of the APA Board of Directors in regard to our recommendation to have the Journal published with OVID. On-line publication will provide convenient access for all subscribers, as well as being another important opportunity for showcasing Australian physiotherapy research internationally.
An editorial published in the Journal some years ago (Crosbie 1997) expressed the view that the Journal was at the crossroads. Around that time the Journal had been unsuccessful in an application for inclusion in MEDLINE and a low level of suitable contributions from Australian researchers raised concerns about the sustainability of the Journal as a top level scientific publication. These two phenomena appeared to be related: the best Australian researchers clearly did not see the Journal as a first choice for publication, as they wanted their work to appear in journals which provided them with maximum exposure to experts in their field. Although the Journal was already indexed by Australian Medical Index, BLDoc, Exerpta Medica (EMBASE), Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), Physiotherapy CATS (British Library), and Redatel, achieving indexing on MEDLINE was seen as a critical indicator of performance.

The Australian Journal of Physiotherapy has now met all the criteria for listing on MEDLINE. In doing so, it has gone well beyond the crossroads and is clearly viewed by an independent international body as a top level scientific publication. This reflects the cumulative efforts of successive Scientific Editors and Editorial Boards, who, in collaboration with the Editor, have worked hard to produce a high quality, internationally recognised and respected Journal. A recent review of core journals of evidence-based physiotherapy practice showed that the Australian Journal of Physiotherapy was ranked the highest of exclusively physiotherapy journals, based on the methodological quality of randomised controlled trials published (Maher et al. 2001).

Listing on MEDLINE can be universally viewed as a great step forward for the Journal, but achieving this goal is only one step. The challenge is to ensure the ongoing success of the Journal as a first-rate scholarly publication that reflects the science and practice of physiotherapy practice in Australia. This can only happen with the support and commitment of all members of the Australian Physiotherapy Association and with a sustained level of quality contributions. Without this, any initiative on the part of the Editorial Board is futile. There are many ways that members can contribute to the Journal. The Editorial Board will consider a range of submissions, from original research articles, to short reports, including case studies or clinical notes. Letters to the Editor on relevant topics are welcome. We encourage potential contributors to look at the new Australian Journal of Physiotherapy Guidelines for Authors (http://www.physiotherapy.asn.au/mediaandpubs/AJP/guidelines_for_authors.htm) and to submit quality contributions for publication in the Australian Journal of Physiotherapy.

References