Clinician's Commentary on Desveaux et al.¹

The findings of Desveaux and colleagues¹ align well with the work of the Leadership Division of the Canadian Physiotherapy Association (CPA). CPA Divisions play a specific role in pursuing, embracing, and using new knowledge. With the help of content experts, an array of individuals' knowledge is integrated to develop new frameworks to help move the profession into the future. Divisions are constitutionally responsible for providing educational experiences and resources to our members. My goal in this commentary is to help align Divisional goals with CPA's strategy to provide coherent, sustainable, and comprehensive professional programming.

Desveaux and colleagues¹ provide a much-needed foundation for research on leadership in the physiotherapy profession. Their results show that regardless of setting, physiotherapists perceive communication, professionalism, and credibility as the most important characteristics of a leader. Desveaux and colleagues draw our attention to the fact that this perception does not align with those of physicians and nurses, who consider emotional intelligence, vision, and business acumen to be the most important leadership characteristics.¹ Furthermore, Desveaux and colleagues identified a disconnect between the public and private sectors with respect to the perceived importance of business acumen. They found that 80% of respondents self-identify as leaders.¹ Their findings are an essential step toward the self-awareness that will allow physiotherapists to pursue leadership roles within the health care system.

Of particular interest are the insightful Discussion section and the authors' thoughtful recommendations for future research. Why do physiotherapists perceive their leadership influence differently in their work environment than in the health care system and in the broader society?

CPA has identified two areas of activity relevant to leadership development. The first is awareness of professional issues: recognizing physiotherapists identified as knowledge and/or action leaders in the national and international health professional communities is crucial.² The second is developing physiotherapists' entrepreneurial skills so that they can become effective personal and organizational leaders.² Desveaux and colleagues' study is well timed, as it recognizes the importance of leadership within the profession and identifies potential areas of impact for leadership development.¹

Furthermore, the Leadership Division is developing a curriculum of core competencies in professional self-awareness, modelling leadership behaviours, and acknowledging leadership qualities in others within the profession and across the health care system,³ incorporating the key findings of Desveaux and colleagues' study. The curriculum also incorporates the seven roles identified in the *Essential Competencies Profile for Physiotherapists*.⁴ The guiding principles for the leadership curriculum series will include the theories of competency-based education, appreciative enquiry, and emotional intelligence.

As Desveaux and colleagues note, "People need to think of themselves as leaders not because they are personally exceptional, but because they can see what needs doing and can work alongside others to do it."^{1(p.375)} The physiotherapy community needs to continue building on this foundational research to advance the profession and to align ourselves as leaders in health care.

The survey results indicate that physiotherapists see their needs as both similar to and different from those of others in the health care community. As Desveaux and colleagues state, "through contributing their unique leadership characteristic profile, physical therapists bring an alternative perspective that can enhance the effectiveness of administrative teams."^{1(p.374)} In light of constant restructuring and increasing fiscal constraints, we are well positioned as a profession to offer a fresh perspective on the health care system. Understanding our perceptions is the first step toward a self-awareness that will allow each of us to excel, whatever our individual roles.

Carol Damp Lowery, BScPT
Chair, Leadership Division, CPA;
Chair, Divisions Chairs Group, CPA;
Quality and Performance Analyst, Holland Bloorview
Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, Toronto

Acknowledgements: The author would like to express my appreciation for the assistance provided by Laura Desveaux and Joe Putos in the creation of this commentary.

REFERENCES

1. Desveaux L, Nanavaty G, Ryan J, et al. Exploring the concept of leadership from the perspective of physical therapists in Canada. *Physiother Can.* 2012;64(4):367–75. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3138/ptc.2011-42>
2. Bradley C. CPA professional development strategy. Presentation to the Division Chairs Component Group, CPA, Toronto; 2010 Nov 12–14.
3. Canadian Physiotherapy Association, Leadership Division. Framework for the development of leadership competences within the physiotherapy profession. Ottawa: The Association; 2012 Feb.
4. National Physiotherapy Advisory Group. Essential competency profile for physiotherapists in Canada. Ottawa: The Group; 2009 Oct [cited 2012 Jun 11]. Available from: <http://www.physiotherapy.ca/PublicUploads/224032Essential%20Competency%20Profile%202009.pdf>

DOI:10.3138/ptc.2011-42-CC