

8th NATIONAL COUNCIL MEETINGSOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY OF PHYSIOTHERAPY – OCTOBER, 1969

Presidential Address

Professor B. Bromilow-Downing, M.B., Ch.B., Professor of
Medical Education and Dean of the Faculty of Medicine,
University of Cape Town

Professor Bromilow-Downing at the 8th National Council Meeting paid tribute to the University of Cape Town which had made it possible for him to be present at the meeting. Being a great believer in the saying "It's not what you say but how you say it" he felt it was important to deliver his address in person, and we, the members of the South African Society of Physiotherapy were proud to have our President with us.

In opening his address Professor Bromilow-Downing emphasised the great store he placed on the office of President of the South African Society of Physiotherapy and told us of his early interest in the "paramedical" professions including Physiotherapy and how one of his first tasks as Dean of the Faculty of Medicine was to introduce the Diploma Course at the University of Cape Town.

Professor Bromilow-Downing dwelt on the evolution of a profession and attempted to define what constitutes a profession. Five of the distinguishing attributes of a profession are, he said, (i) systematic theory, (ii) authority, (iii) community sanction, (iv) ethical codes, and (v) a culture.

"In the developmental process of a profession it is necessary that a form of monopoly is the result. In other words the professional skill becomes developed to such a degree that only members of the profession are competent to perform acts pertaining to that profession. Looking at the medical and legal professions today in this country the monopoly is, in fact, protected by legislation. It is the sincere hope of all emergent professions or professions that have recently emerged that such a similar legally backed professional protection will come their way, not in their own interest but in the interest of those members of the public whom they wish to serve."

This monopoly, however, must have a built-in regulative code which compels ethical behaviour on the part of its members, thus gaining public confidence without which a profession could not retain its monopoly. Professor Bromilow-Downing stressed that in his opinion a further distinguishing attribute of a profession is the realisation by practising members themselves of the need to impose upon themselves a code of professional ethics.

A professional society must of necessity have two functions, the first being to look after the pecuniary or financial

interests of its members, i.e. salaries, conditions of service, etc. (The "Trade Union" function), the second being a "professional" function whereby the society undertakes to maintain the standards of service provided by its members to the public and whereby it voluntarily imposes upon itself a disciplinary code of ethical conduct.

Professor Bromilow-Downing explained that a professional society could not give unqualified assistance to members who feel aggrieved as a result of a personal situation, unless the question is one of professional principle and not a matter of personal discrimination. In view of past events he thought the Society might investigate an insurance policy as protection for its members.

Physiotherapy, in our President's opinion, is amongst the first of the paramedical professions sufficiently well developed, organised, and controlled to be subjected to compulsory registration. "The strength of a profession can be measured by the strength of the professional association. Aggrieved members of any professional association do not act in the best interests of their association by tendering their resignation. No cause has ever been won by resignation. Aggrieved members should remain within the society and fight their own battles and not embarrass their fellow members by resigning and weakening their cause".

A further piece of excellent advice offered by our President was that rules of procedure should be strictly adhered to in all committee work. "Short cuts, indiscretion, talking out of Committee and the like can only lead to a chaotic situation," he said.

Finally Professor Bromilow-Downing said: "Your Society enjoys the highest regard of the members of my Committee of the Medical Council and I would like here to pay tribute to the work done by those members of your Society who give up so much of their time to consideration of problems pertaining to the profession and to wait on my Committee which is so very dependent on advice given. I am sure that few members here present know of the devotion to duty and devotion to the interests of their profession at the cost of their own personal time given by so many of the members."

The President then concluded by wishing the South African Society of Physiotherapy a further successful year in 1969/70 and in particular a profitable and enjoyable National Council Meeting.