

50 Years of History

Australia

Name of organisation: Australian Physiotherapy Association Musculoskeletal Group

Previously: Manipulative Therapists Association of Australia; Manipulative Physiotherapists Association of Australia; Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Australia

Year organisations started: 1966

Member of IFOMPT since: 1980

Key Influences through the years: Numerous individuals have influenced OMPT in Australia and internationally with leadership in clinical practice and research in the field. These include: Geoffrey Maitland, Brian Edwards and Patricia Trott (first 3 specialist manipulative therapists by examination in Australia, awarded Fellowships of the Australian College of Physiotherapists (ACP) in 1983), Robert Elvey, Lance Twomey, Gwendolen Jull, Paul Hodges, Peter O'Sullivan, David Butler, Lorimer Moseley.

Developments over the years: OMPT developed and evolved from clinical expertise. Geoffrey Maitland taught the first formal course (3-month) in 1965 and in 1974, the first 1-year postgraduate university-based programs began in Adelaide and Perth. Within the next 15 years, the six major universities offered a masters level program. Being within universities, scientific enquiry has been a pillar of OMPT and Australia has a strong research record and commitment to advancing clinical practice. Clinical specialisation training programs in OMPT are offered by the Australian College of Physiotherapists (APA). A change in OMPT in Australia has been in its status as an independent organisation in the APA. It is now a special interest group within the APA.

Major changes or challenges in the last 50 years: Numerous challenges and changes have faced OMPT in Australia, including models of care, models of funding, external professional recognition, development and decline of postgraduate teaching programs, an explosion in the number of undergraduate training programs and being a special interest group within a large APA. In 1976 physiotherapists became first contact practitioners, but are still not publicly funded (Medicare). Insurers and the private sector have a flat rebate for physiotherapy services with no remuneration for additional qualifications. Numerous university-based postgraduate OMPT programs were developed in the 2000's, but only four survive and are threatened due to lower numbers and the high demands of clinical time. Training in OMPT will continue via a process of titling through the APA and training for clinical specialisation in musculoskeletal physiotherapy continues in the ACP. 79 musculoskeletal physiotherapists across Australia have been awarded Clinical Fellowships. There has been an explosion in the undergraduate physiotherapy offerings at universities across Australia with dilution of the teaching talent and clinical practice. Being a special interest group in the APA has some advantages: greater administrative and financial support for development and delivery of professional development courses, advocacy for changes in legislation, governance and funding, marketing to enhance the recognition of physiotherapists. However, being one of 20 special interest groups in the APA has in part led to a loss of identity, autonomy and contact with members.

Current status and challenges: Continuance of university-based OMT masters degree is constantly being challenged; challenge of ensuring development of an alternate APA experiential pathway in musculoskeletal physiotherapy that meets IFOMPT standards; the challenge of defining advanced practice and specialisation.

The future of the organisation: Despite challenges, our organisation has the capacity to change and evolve. We are actively involved in driving OMPT forwards, influencing the quality and standard of other special interest groups within the APA. We have a large cohort of engaged members who want to be involved in continuing to change and evolve the profession from within.
