

**The story of the Physiotherapy History of British Columbia (PTHBC)  
A task force formed between the Retired Physiotherapist Group of BC (RPG)  
and the Physiotherapy Association of B.C. (PABC) in 2014**

***"The purpose of the PTHBC Committee is to safeguard the history of the valuable work contributed by pioneer Physiotherapists in British Columbia whilst memories and materials are still accessible and to ensure that the best systems are in place to continue the archiving for future generations."***

In 1927, a group of seven women formed the Vancouver Division of the British Columbia Branch of the "Canadian Association of Massage and Remedial Gymnasts" which became known in 1935 as the Canadian Physiotherapy Association (CPA). The B.C. Branch of the CPA was incorporated in 1945 and was renamed the Physiotherapy Association of B.C. (PABC) in 1978. PABC has been serving its members for over 70 years and is governed by a Board of Directors.

As the voice of the members, PABC ensures that they have access to practice support, professional development and advocacy tools to ensure that British Columbians receive quality care that keeps them moving for life. PABC represents members' expertise in improving health outcomes to government, health authorities, insurers, and to the public. In 2017, there were over 2,300 members of PABC.

One of our earliest finds was a document written by Hazel Southard of the History of the Vancouver Division of the B.C. Branch of CPA from 1927 to 1968, prepared for the CPA Fiftieth Birthday Party in 1970. From Hazel's written record there were 152 members in 1967. A big jump in numbers from seven in 1927, to 152 in 1967, to over 2,300 in 2017.

Licensing in B.C. began with what was originally known as the Association of Physiotherapists and Massage Practitioners (APMP) in 1946. The APMP Act was enacted with Part 1 (CPA members) requiring a physician referral and Part 2 having primary access. Part 3 were massage therapists who required a physician referral. Then in 1994, under the Health Professions Act, the College of Physical Therapists of British Columbia (CPTBC) was formed in which all physical therapists were given primary access. Registration in CPTBC remains mandatory in order to practice Physiotherapy in B.C. and in 2017, there were 4,246 registrants of the College.

Today, the CPTBC is a not-for-profit organization responsible for regulating the practice of physical therapists in the public interest. The mandate of the College of Physical Therapists of British Columbia is to serve and protect the public by establishing, monitoring and enforcing standards of physical therapy practices and professional ethics, responding to the public's need for information about the practice of physical therapy and for reinforcing the physical therapists' awareness of their professional responsibilities and obligations.

The College sets standards for entry into the profession, registers physical therapists, sets and enforces a set of rules that registrants must follow and develops programs to promote the

highest standards of physical therapy practice. The College also investigates complaints and disciplines physical therapists who have been found guilty of professional misconduct or incompetence.

A quote from Michael Crichton,

***“Professor Johnston often said that if you did not know History, you didn’t know anything. You were a leaf that did not know you were part of a tree.”***

Physiotherapy in B.C. is like a tree. We have grown and grown from a humble sapling to the giant tree we are today. Retracing our growth from leaves to branches and back to the trunk is something that gives us, as physiotherapists, a perspective of where we came from and where we are going. The History of Physiotherapy in B.C. can enlighten, inform, edify and educate us.

We have a great deal to be proud of as Rebecca Tunnacliffe discovered as the PABC CEO. She wrote an article about our B.C. History back in 2009. Through her research, Rebecca discovered many areas in which physiotherapists in B.C. had initiated new treatments, new programs, new CPA Divisions and have often led the way forward in Canada.

Kierkegaard, the Danish Philosopher, said,

***“Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.”***

The problem with capturing our History of Physiotherapy in B.C. is because of that very massive growth. Our background is complex and wide-ranging. To fully understand the history of physiotherapy in our province, we realized we needed to look at both PABC and CPTBC as well as at the Universities of UBC and UNBC. Happily, our licensing body, College of Physical Therapists of B.C. (CPTBC) has fared well with their archives due to the diligence of the registrars and the legal requirement for record keeping. The professional body of PABC archives, not so much; although PABC did have some boxes of archival material, whole decades were missing. For example, some of the history from the early sixties and seventies has just vanished. With the exception of CPTBC, the other organizations were rather horrified to find that their own historical materials and archives were very limited. Another disappointment was to find that due to many moves on campus, the School of Rehabilitation Medicine was also missing boxes of archives.

One of our pioneers of physiotherapy in B.C. was Mrs. Ruth Fortune. Like so many other new physiotherapists arriving in Vancouver, Mrs. Fortune was my first boss in Canada at the Vancouver General Hospital in 1969. After a very long and illustrious career, Mrs. F. (as she was affectionately known) passed away in 2012 and was mourned by all that knew her. We held a memorial event for her, which we called ***“Remembering Ruth”***. As we were trying to put together the pieces of her long career, we found that there was little of her history from the 40’s, 50’s or 60’s captured for posterity.

Everyone was keen to participate in an event for Ruth Fortune, recognizing that it was an opportunity to reconnect with old friends and colleagues. Brenda Tillotson, Joan Johnston, Sheila Cox (OT) and I helped to plan the event and reached out to others in the physiotherapy and occupational therapy communities. The people Brenda talked to seem to want a History of Physiotherapy Development in B.C., listing our progress over many years from poor organization toward Quality Assurance and Programme Planning, Education etc. Ruth's contribution was of course a major part in this development.

At the memorial held on November 17, 2012, Brenda talked about "Ruth, Department Head over 3 decades" – a short serious talk on Hospital Physiotherapy Departments in the 50s, usually housed in the basement, with no authority, no funding for education, little recognition etc. Brenda followed this by telling half a dozen amusing tales that illustrated how, with Ruth's strength, calmness, sense of fun and encouragement, Department Heads educated themselves to organize departments which gave a high quality of care and even saw into a future of no departments, instead beginning the use of more globally focused program planning within hospital and rehabilitation settings. **"Remembering Ruth"** was indeed a memorable event and people talked animatedly and reminisced with their past colleagues. It was agreed that more work should be done to capture and document our physiotherapy history in British Columbia.

Initially, Brenda had hoped to use her own contribution on "PT Department Development over four decades", to collate the material and ask the CEO of PABC, Rebecca Tunnacliffe, to edit and put the material in a suitable format for the CPA/ PABC (at the time almost non-existent) archives. Brenda had hoped that we could write an anthology where physiotherapy history, photographs, and amusing memories in various writing styles could all be included. It would be broader in scope, but Ruth Fortune's work would obviously be a large part of it. This could be dedicated to Ruth and would be a long-lasting tribute to her. After the memorial, Brenda brought together a small advisory group by email with the intention of preparing a brief to send to the CPA.

In 2013, Brenda Tillotson contacted PABC, CPTBC, The New Zealand Physiotherapy Association (NZPT), CSP Oral History Group and the Retired Surrey Teachers Assoc. (RSTA) Oral History Working Group.

Dr. David Nicholls from the New Zealand Physiotherapy Association was Chairman of the NZ Physiotherapy History Working group. Brenda wrote to Dr. Nicholls to say how we admired the website created to celebrate NZ PT Centennial year. She explained the difficulties we were experiencing in setting up a similar working group. Dave replied suggesting a Skype meeting which Brenda recorded. She really learned a great deal from Dave about the setting up and completion of their NZ project. As the Project Manager, Dr. Dave Nicholls had done most of the work, business plan, interviewing, aural editing. He mentioned that the air travel to conduct interviews in various parts of the country was costly. The end result however is excellent. The web site preserves physiotherapy history in a virtual archive which includes sound, images and text. Vignettes rather than interviews are interesting to the general readership, which in turn gives the public a better understanding of the Physiotherapy History of New Zealand.

Brenda also reached out to the UK Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) where Dr. Barbara Richardson was Chairman of the Oral History Working Group. Interestingly, Barbara had worked for a short time for Canadian Arthritis and Rheumatism Society (CARS) in B.C. in the seventies. The UK project process was good: by forming the working group of 15 interviewers drawn from across England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales (interviews were carried out mainly within a forty-mile radius from each interviewer's home), it enabled the collection of a broad range of interviews from across the UK. The collecting of oral histories and depositing them in the British library and in the CSP Library went smoothly, where they are currently available to visitors. The British Library intends to provide podcasts of some interviews in the future and following a current IT up-grade at the CSP it is hoped that some will be available on-line to augment a documentation of historical events. It is clear that the 95 CSP interviews carry a great wealth of information and the content of the interviews has been cross referenced for future research.

One of the few things that these two projects had in common was that they were both sponsored and funded by their National Associations. Brenda felt that we needed to further discuss our relationship to CPA regarding our project. Her recommendations after reading about this subject, discussing it with archivists, with Dr. Barbara Richardson and Dr. Dave Nicholls was that we should archive our Physiotherapy History in virtual format on the internet using text, sound and images. We realized that we would only be able to achieve this goal if we could find the resources, expertise and funds to carry out the project.

We discovered that the Newfoundland and Labrador Physiotherapy Association Archives Committee had begun the process of audiotaping their pioneers and had been transcribing those interviews. We reached out to them to find out more about their provincial project.

Brenda widened the scope from just B.C. and sent a Brief to CPA in May 2014 entitled **"A Proposal for a Virtual Archive of Canadian Physiotherapy History"** using the results of her research. At the time, the Canadian Physiotherapy Association explained that they had not yet set aside funding or administrative resources for such a project.

Not to be deterred, we used the mailing lists we had gathered for the memorial for Mrs. Ruth Fortune and sent out invitations for a lunch to set up the formation of a Retired Physiotherapy Group of British Columbia (RPG of BC). Because not all physiotherapists had been members of PABC, we needed to cast a wider net. Both the PABC and CPTBC helped us by sending out our notices to their retired membership lists. We had over 75 replies and the inaugural meeting of RPG was held on Thursday, June 12, 2014 at the University Women's Club of Vancouver at Hycroft. We met for lunch and presented a Power Point Presentation on the urgent need to capture our Physiotherapy History in B.C. as well as describing the need to recover, create and store archival material. We were pleased with the feedback following the presentation and felt ready to move forward with the history project.

It was agreed to form a Social Group called the Retired Physiotherapists Group (RPG) of B.C. and to meet once a year. Since that first year of 2014, the RPG have continued to meet for an

annual lunch. Each year at the RPG Lunch, PTHBC has given a short report, displayed some of the contributions and continued to ask for submissions and participation in the History Project.

From the list of PTs who signed up in 2014 as being interested in the History Project, we formed a mailing list which we have continued to expand. From this list and from the people who had been Brenda's support system in the writing of the brief to CPA, we formed a PTHBC Advisory Group. That summer, Rhona Burslem and I met with Rebecca Tunnacliffe, then CEO of the Physiotherapy Association of British Columbia (PABC) to request funding and administrative help for the project. The Board of PABC agreed and a task force was set up between the newly formed Retired Physiotherapy Group and the PABC, which became known as the Physiotherapy History of BC (PTHBC).

### **Our Dream or Ultimate Goal of the project for the PTHBC**

- Launch a Virtual Exhibit online about our History of Physiotherapy in BC (PTHBC)
- Oral Histories, interviews and historical documents both stored safely and made accessible online.
- All other documents housed in safe places and preferably archived at an institution; efficiently catalogued and made accessible to researchers
- History of Physiotherapy in B.C. recorded for perpetuity

Brenda passed away in December 2014 and was content to see that her dream had begun to be realized, if not nationally then provincially.

The aim of PTHBC is to collect, document and preserve the contributions physiotherapists have made to our patients and our profession in B.C. We came up with the idea that this should be done before the five "Ds" occur: Deafness, Diminished Vision, Downsizing, Dementia and the last but inevitable D, Death.

After we had researched Oral History techniques and visited local archives, Rhona Burslem created a robust framework for the project. Rhona wrote the protocols and recording guidelines for the project and created Consent and Deed of Gift forms to be signed by the physiotherapists giving oral and written contributions. The relatively small budget from PABC covered equipment purchases of two iPods and two Apogee Mics, postage and packing, some office supplies and travel costs.

The PTHBC Advisory Group members are Agnes Jackman, Bruce Clark, Charlotte Burns, Hilary Crowley (Prince George), Janice Masur, Jillian Scarth, Joan Johnston, Karen van der Hoop, Margaret Warcup (Terrace), Nancy Cho, Pamela Jeacocke, Patricia Grohne, Rhona Burslem, Sheila Benwell Veuger and Therese Lord. The Advisory Group have met several times each year to discuss our strategies. A snowballing methodology was set up by using email or phone contact to invite retired members to help identify potential interviewees and call for interested members to recommend people or self-nominate to be interviewed. We created a brochure and business cards to promote the History Project and set up a PTHBC email account.

Patricia Grohne and Rhona Burslem, as retired volunteers, became trained in the process of Oral History interviewing and use of the iPods and Apogee mics as audio recorders. We made it clear to all contributors, both oral and written, that:

***Physiotherapy History of BC (PTHBC)***

***In sending us your contribution to the archive, you are giving us your permission to make spelling and typographical corrections (if any), number the pages, publish it and/or post it on the Internet.***

Over 24 interviews, including two group interviews, of one to two hours have been carried out with interviewees, most of whom are retired. An expertise matrix of place and type of work ensured perspectives from a range of practice areas across British Columbia. Interviewees come from different areas of physiotherapy work, background experience, and job descriptions. There is a geographical spread which includes Prince George and Vancouver Island, however we are still missing interviews and stories from some other parts of the province.

We reached out for written contributions and to date, nearly forty have been submitted. The largest body of work is still being completed by Therese Lord. She is writing a History of the Orthopaedic Division of CPA, with both national and provincial references. She has collected close to forty completed questionnaires and is in process of writing up this history.

At this moment, the collection of written contributions and oral histories are housed in the cloud on the PTHBC Dropbox for safekeeping, paid for by PABC. We recognized the inherent danger of keeping these invaluable contributions on our own computers.

In 2000, PABC changed from paper to a digital format for all communication with the membership, including the newsletters. To our delight, we found that the newsletters from 1976 to 2000 were being stored by PABC in paper format. Meetings with Archivists at City of Vancouver Archives and UBC University Archivist and Archivist UBC Rare Books & Special Collections led to the offer by Christopher Hives, University Archivist, to scan them for us which he did at no charge in the spring of 2015. They scanned the box of PABC Newsletters onto a digital memory stick which can now be uploaded to the PTHBC Dropbox. The hard copies of the Newsletters have been returned to PABC.

We have reviewed the storage boxes at PABC and re-boxed and relabelled them. Sadly, many of the historical photographs are of social events. There are very few photos of treatments. The history of APMP Part 1 and 11 is stored with the licensing body, CPTBC. We will be accessing some of the personal recollections of the changes to legislation through written contributions and the recording of Oral Histories. We have added new boxes of documents from personal collections to the PABC Archives and these records and those previously existing at PABC are available for further research. Records of CARS are housed at the City of Vancouver Archives and the fonds of Jane Hudson and Margaret Hood; Co-founders of the School of Rehabilitation Medicine will soon be stored at UBC.

Since 2015, PTHBC have also been given a table each year as one of the exhibitors at the Annual Physio Forum of BC, a joint event with PABC, CPTBC, UBC and UNBC. At the Forums, we have used a poster encouraging physiotherapists to “Write, Share or Tell” their stories, have advertised in the Forum Program, displayed old physiotherapy photographs and asked for people to sign up if they are interested in the History project. The Advisory committee members have acted as volunteers, with the following purposes of having a PTHBC History Display Table:

1. Create awareness of PT History BC (PTHBC) Project
2. Report on progress to date – see binders for stories & interviews
3. If PT is new to PTHBC, give out business card or brochure
4. Sign-up sheets - get PT's to sign up with contact info and area of interest
5. Capture enthusiasm for participation: Write, Share, Tell
6. Get PTs to collaborate with colleagues to capture shared PT history
7. **ASK** for information about CPA Divisions and get volunteers
8. Ask them to send any contact info for older retired colleagues to [pthistorybc@gmail.com](mailto:pthistorybc@gmail.com) especially those who worked in 40's, 50's, 60's and 70's
9. **Request that they pass on PTHBC information to all their colleagues, past and present**
10. Encourage groundswell of support for a National PT History Project (For completion by 2020)
11. Tell PTs that PABC is supporting the PTHBC both administratively and financially
12. Use CLIPBOARD to write down ideas and notes

On April 22, 2017, PTHBC participated in the Physio Forum Rapid Fire Presentations, with three slides in three minutes about the need for contributions to the History Project, which was well received. The message was to encourage all PTs to begin documenting their own histories.

Like a snowball, the project is gaining size and momentum as it rolls along. Our goal is that we will have received contributions from individuals, from institutions and hospitals, each B.C. Section of the CPA Divisions, Interest Groups, Rehabilitation Centres, CPTBC, PABC, UBC and UNBC before the project is completed. Recently, we were delighted to find the complete history of one of the Unions, the Health Sciences Association (HSA) written up by Dan Keeton; another great find.

Oral History taking is in vogue in 2018. “*Oral History*,” the British oral historian Paul Thompson said, “*is a history built around people. It thrusts life into history itself and widens its scope. It allows heroes not just from the leaders, but also from the unknown majority of the people.*”

A little bird told me that some physiotherapists may be feeling guilty of procrastination in not yet writing up their histories or telling their stories. Please do not feel guilty. There is a solution. You may remember the five D's which threaten all Physiotherapy History Projects..... Downsizing, Deafness, Diminished Vision, Dementia and the last D, Death?

Well, there are another five D's, when thinking about writing or telling your history, here is what you can do to take away the guilt and make you feel better. It comes from Kevin Lawrence about "Getting Things Done:

1. **Do it.** Bite the bullet and do it immediately
2. **Date it.** Commit to completing it by a specific date sometime down the road.
3. **Delegate it.** Assign it. Find a colleague who is a better writer and has a better memory
4. **Don't do it.** Say 'no', if it's simply not your thing
5. **Delete it.** Decide it's not going to happen for you but do encourage others to do theirs

Hopefully, you will decide on one of the first three D's, Do it, Date it or Delegate it before the other five D's get to all of us and the memories of our physiotherapy careers fade away.

There is a Chinese proverb,

***"The faintest ink is more powerful than the strongest memory"***

A special thank you goes to the Advisory Committee of the PTHBC. Without their support, the work we have done would not have been possible. Thank you to those of you who sat each year at the History Table both at the RPG Lunches and at the Annual Physio Forums and reached out to former colleagues. Over the years, this exposure to both working and retired PTs has helped to widen the scope and interest in our History Project.

We still have a little way to go. However, we are encouraged by the interest shown by CPA and by the fact that PABC will be taking over the responsibility for this history project. We are particularly grateful to Dr. Dave Nicholls for setting up the International Physiotherapy History Association ([www.history.physio](http://www.history.physio)) which will help all of us to capture the History of Physiotherapy from a worldwide perspective. I will leave you with another of my favourite quotes: Henry Steele Commager (1902 –1998) an American historian said:

***"History is organized memory."***

Submitted by:  
Patricia Grohne  
Co-Chair, PTHBC  
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