

Her wonders never cease

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This article is dedicated to the memory of the late Avraham Werner, Shulamit's beloved husband for 70 years and the father of their four children, who passed away peacefully on March 2, 2023 during the preparation of this article. May his memory be for a blessing.

Abstract

Mrs. Shulamit (Shula) Werner, a prominent leader of the Israeli physical therapy profession, recently marked her ninetieth birthday, which was celebrated by many of her professional and personal friends at the Physical Therapy Department at Tel Aviv University. This was followed by an interview (held by the authors of the present article), focusing on Shula's personal and professional growth as a witness to the development of the physical therapy profession in Israel, and as one who has left her mark on the profession over the course of approximately 65 years.

Shula was born in Austria in 1932 and completed her elementary and high school studies in Jerusalem at the end of the Israeli War of Independence. Immediately after the establishment of the State of Israel, the need to train professional physical therapists became apparent, due to the rehabilitation challenges posed by the many wounded from the War of Independence, the many disabled individuals due to the polio epidemics that swept the country, and the diverse health issues faced by both the refugees of the Holocaust and the numerous immigrants arriving from around the world.

In 1953, the first School of Physical Therapy opened at Assaf Harofeh Hospital at the initiative of the Ministry of Health and with the support of the World Health Organization. It offered a three-year program that awarded a diploma in physical therapy and was based on the standards of the World Health Organization. Shula is a graduate of the second cycle of this program. It was not long before Shula was identified as an exemplary professional, who was passionate about the significance of the profession and demonstrated a broad holistic view of the role of physical therapy within the health care system. No less important, from very early on Shula demonstrated distinct leadership qualities, which enabled her to persuade colleagues from within and outside of the physical therapy profession to join forces with her in order to realize her vision regarding optimal health care and the role of physical therapy within this care.

Shula was a pioneer in many areas of the profession in Israel, including understanding the importance of providing physical therapy rehabilitation within the community, promoting women's health issues in physical therapy, establishing a formal clinical training process, and more. However, there is no doubt that the highlight of Shula's work was the founding of the School of Physical Therapy at Tel HaShomer in 1976. The educational program she developed at Tel HaShomer was instrumental to the establishment of the Department of Physical Therapy at Tel Aviv University in 1978 - as an academic department that offered a bachelor degree in physical therapy.

Her immense love of her profession and the joy and gentle humor that has accompanied her work over the years stem from a deep belief that she has the power to change the world. Shula continues to impress and inspire others with her analytical thinking and holistic approach. Her many admiring colleagues continue to regard her as a role model they aspire to emulate. Her wonders never cease!