

1990 ROBERT G. DICUS AWARD ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

Alfonso Amato, P.T.

Each year at the Fall Conference of the Private Practice Section of the APTA, a member of the section receives the prestigious Robert G. Dicus Award for outstanding service. This year, the award went to Alfonso Amato, P.T.

Thank you, Ernie, and thank you all for your kind welcome.

Pete Lord told me I was to be the recipient of the Robert Dicus Award this year. You can imagine my surprise that I should be chosen for an award whose past recipients have been my mentors and role models. They generally represent the history of the growth of private practice, indeed the maturation of the physical therapy profession. I was too young to be recognized, done too little, and besides, had done what I considered was expected of a professional.

Physical therapy has grown as a profession. We work in many different practice settings, treat an ever expanding variety of patients, and must continually upgrade our knowledge. These changes have brought us to where we are today.



Alfonso Amato, P.T.

I am not so young that I cannot remember rebelling against the "all-white dress code" and seeking recognition as a professional. Just one person rebelling against dress codes, or fighting for professional recognition would never have been enough. History teaches us that in times of change there may have been a visionary leader, but if the vision was not shared and supported by others, that vision would have become a forgotten dream.

In other words, the times were ripe for change and growth—and although few, like the past Robert Dicus Award recipients, were singled out as leaders—in reality they are symbols of our profession. We are leaders just trying to keep up with this growing profession. So, in the spirit of being a symbol of the progress in physical therapy private practice over the last 27 years, I am proud to accept this award for all of us.

Before I go on, please allow me to recognize those in my life who encouraged, inspired, and pushed me along to this point in my life.

First, my parents.

My Dad, who originated the term "just do it"—always with love. Only in Italian it sounded like "presto, presto, do your very besto!" He was a leader in his own field of geriatrics and taught me the responsibility to contribute to your profession.

Mom was the strong, silent type. She taught the value of love, of family—and that art, literature, and music were food for the soul. She also taught me the obligation and joy to contribute to the society

in which we live. They both showed by example the value of God in my life. As Italian emigrants, they both believed in giving back to this great country, in gratitude for the opportunities they found, and to insure those same opportunities were there for future generations.

I need to mention another influential person during my growing years . . . Sister Thomasina, my 8th grade teacher. This woman had the bushiest eyebrows, and the best throwing arm, in the state of Florida! She could hit a fly at 30 feet with chalk or erasers, so the back of my head was an easy target for her! She would catch me day dreaming, or talking, and to regain my attention she would throw erasers. I would get hit so often in a day with erasers that my parents thought I was getting prematurely gray hair. To this day, I always face a nun!

Why was she so influential? She would say, "Allie, pay attention, or the world will pass you by." Well, I heard her words, but I didn't understand her until much later. I am sure it would have been even later if it wasn't for her marksmanship.

I realized, finally, that I didn't want to wake up in 30 years and ask what happened—I wanted to be where it was happening. And to be where it's happening in physical therapy, I chose to be active in the private practice section.

As a therapist, we can all point to those who have made a difference in our professional lives. My list is long, but let me just mention

a few of these most excellent people.

Bob Hickock—Mr. Physical Therapy in St. Louis and my mentor. He encouraged me to try private practice and challenged me to emphasize quality as the way toward success.

Steve Rose—who exemplified the physical therapy renaissance man of integrity. His love of learning and commitment to improving our profession was infectious. I will always value the friendship we shared.

Bill Dunn and Jerry Lampe—who encouraged me to take the first step into private practice. They are unselfish in their support and friendship.

Clem Eishon, Jim McKillop and Charles Magistro—inspirational leaders who I admired and tried to emulate.

My closest friends are in physical therapy; many are here tonight—Francis Guglielmo and his wife, Barbara, Ben and Mary Jo Johnston, Mike Weinper, Carol Lewis/Wagner, Jay Goodfarb, Tom Carlson, Jerry Connolly, Donna and Buddy Rodriguez, Bob Doctor, Helene Fearon, Cynthia Driskell, Stan Paris, Dave Apts, Larry and Charlotte Petulla, Ernie Burch, and Ginny Davis—these and many others who share themselves, and their care and enthusiasm—who exemplify the credo of, "In order to lead, you must learn to serve."

My wife, Bea, who will share in this award, as we share everything else. She worked side by side with me to grow in the profession. Her love and support truly are the reason I am here. Bea inspired my confidence, because she believes in me. She reminds me that, "It is more important who you are than what you have."

Thank you, Bea!

There are several points I would like to make tonight:

1. The value of contributing to our profession;
2. The value of positive thinking; and
3. Believing in the future of physical therapy.

Earlier, I said that you honor me for doing what I thought was

expected of me. I mean that, and it illustrates the point that I have gotten much more out of physical therapy and the private practice section by being active and involved.

For instance, my best ideas in St. Louis were really based on information I gained at a meeting of private practitioners. Friendships developed at professional meetings are lasting, satisfying, and comforting—because they are based on shared values and experiences.

So, as an active, contributing member of the private practice section, I will gain far more than I could ever give. I expect that is true in all we do.

To paraphrase the army ad, "Join the private practice section, be all you can be!"

Our profession is an enigma—we are growing, expanding our scope of practice. But there are forces external and internal which try to hold us back—we want to grow, but are afraid to do so; we want to grow, but others prevent us.

We are like an ever tightening spring—if the spring's potential energy is not released, then it will break.

So it is with physical therapy—the expanding scope of practice and knowledge base is our potential.

Are we ready to release that energy to grow—or shall we allow all that energy to turn within and tear us apart? This concern brings me to the following:

I don't have to tell you about positive thinking and having faith in the future of physical therapy. You all are here because you had those qualities and moved into private practice. What I am afraid of is that you won't share those qualities with your colleagues.

Try not to become so involved with your practice that you don't share your enthusiasm—enthusiasm is contagious; nor fail to lead by example—your example will encourage others to follow.

There are many physical therapists out there

- who are afraid of independent practice,

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- afraid of encroachment by other professions,
- who don't see physical therapy as a lasting life's work,
- who don't worry about the integrity of a society which allows financial gain at the expense of the consumer,
- who might be afraid of staff privileges,
- who are afraid of change,
- and those who just don't care about the future of physical therapy.

These people need our enthusiasm—and we need each other to continually reaffirm the “good news” of physical therapy and private practice. The potential is there for us to grow, to cause change—and make external changes into opportunities. Then we will prosper as individuals and as a profession.

Physical therapy today is not what I found in 1964 when a graduated, or 1980, or even 1985. I know it will be different by 1995.

To take advantage of the future, you have to believe in it. Believe in yourselves, you have it in you. Believe in physical therapy, it will sustain you.

Remember, I accept this award as a symbol of what we have grown to be, and will become.

The future is exciting and bright for us all. I look forward to applauding your accomplishments in your time.

Thank you. ■



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