

## IN REMEMBRANCE

# Tribute to Clare Mary O'Hagan

26 June 1932 – 25 July 2018

Marcia Drennan and Ann Newsom pay respects to Clare O'Hagan, a talented physiotherapist with a love for writing and a passion for helping others.

Clare O'Hagan (nee Graham) grew up in Otago (Taieri Mouth and Waihola) and went to college in Dunedin. Clare graduated from the Dunedin School of Physiotherapy in 1953, and gained her ACTL in drama and public speaking. In 1955 she married John O'Hagan; together they had six children and lived in Winton, Invercargill and Christchurch.

Clare was a compassionate woman with a fine intellect.

In her own words; "My first love was literature and the stage, and I brought these skills to my physiotherapy practise. Conversely my physiotherapy practise enhanced my stage work".



Clare worked part time at antenatal and postnatal work while her family were young. In the early 1960's and mid 1970's John's medical studies took them to the United Kingdom and while there she worked in several outpatient departments.

She recalled, however, "most of my professional energy from 1969 to 1989 was devoted to teaching drama and public speaking".

On her return to New Zealand in 1975 Clare took a three week re-entry course in Christchurch. She continued to work in both physiotherapy and drama and public speaking.

Following a family tragedy in 1985, when her son Sean drowned in Fiordland while crossing the Haast River, she attended the International Congress of the World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT) in Sydney. At this conference Carol M Davis and physiotherapists at the forefront of geriatrics inspired Clare to return to physiotherapy full time. Clare recalled, "I realised physiotherapy with older people was an exciting and satisfying career, not just for my age group, but also for younger physiotherapists".

Clare later observed, "I notice I punctuate my life pre and post 1985".

Stimulated by a greater emphasis on accountability in the health sector, and with renewed passion, Clare responded by gathering around her a team of younger physiotherapists with an interest in neurology and problem solving.

"At this time there was a need to upgrade geriatric services in the private sector," Clare recalled.

In 1988 Clare formed Physiotherapy Geriatric Services in Christchurch, the first practice of its kind, which was accredited through the Private Physiotherapists Association. In 1993 she represented New Zealand at an international course in Malta for physiotherapists working with the elderly, hosted by the United Nations. "This was a highlight" Clare said. She published a report from her Malta experience titled 'The First International Training

Course for Physical Therapists in the Field of Ageing' in the New Zealand Journal of Physiotherapy in 1994.

As well as setting up over 20 exercise classes in rest homes in Christchurch and delivering manual handling training to nurses, Clare gained contracts to provide classes for Arthritis New Zealand and the Stroke Foundation New Zealand. Clare conducted research and published a paper titled 'Exercise in Rest Homes: Effect on Physical Function' in the New Zealand Medical Journal in 1994.

In 1990 she prepared a comprehensive injury prevention programme based on her research.

Clare was well known for her Train the Trainer programmes. One carer at Cashmere View Rest Home in Christchurch recalled, "I remember her pause gymnastics. Clare's commanding voice would boom over the speaker system at regular intervals. We had to stop what we were doing immediately and follow her exercise instructions... rather like a holiday camp!" Clare believed strongly a physiotherapist's role extended beyond patient care to caring for the carers.

Clare had the ability to reach out to the public and communicate ideas clearly and with conviction. She wrote many educational pamphlets. Her last pamphlet produced in 2017 was titled 'Have you fallen or do you fear falling?'

In the late 1990's her practice gained a large Ministry of Health contract following the deinstitutionalisation of Templeton Hospital. At this time Clare formed her dream team of physiotherapists, dieticians, speech and language, music and occupational therapists to service the contract. The name of the business was changed to Therapy Professionals and it became a transdisciplinary team of specialists working in the community with intellectually disabled former Templeton clients.

This is where Clare's vision of transdisciplinary work came to fruition. All disciplines attended weekly client meetings with combined notes, visits and education sessions.

Over time Clare's practice grew in employee numbers to a maximum of 35 and moved from a small office above the O'Hagan garage, to industrial buildings in the city. Following the quakes, Clare accommodated the business once again in the garage of her apartment while the current office was being re-purposed.

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Since 1999, Clare's daughter Shonagh has managed Therapy Professionals Ltd. It is still the only transdisciplinary allied health community practice in Christchurch. Clare remained a passionately interested Director and mentor until she died.

Clare will be remembered by many for her vision, respect for the rights of all people, generosity of spirit, creative approaches to teaching and her wonderful sense of humour.

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*by Marcia Drennan & Ann Newsom*

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