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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Research or Retrench: the teaching profession challenged

To the Editor:

Our thesis, "Research or retrench: the teaching profession challenged," is borrowed from our rehabilitation colleagues, who long ago recognized the importance of research for documenting the effectiveness of their treatments (1). Similarly, I am struck by the paucity of scientific documentation, established by experimental research, supporting specific teaching strategies. We educators are therefore challenged to ask ourselves, "What is teaching's main virtue?" When one views the entire field of teaching, one is struck by the realization that teaching's main virtue is *not* its scientific basis. Rather, teaching's main virtue may be the intense relationship between teacher and student. Thus, with teaching, art and human relationships predominate, with only sporadic borrowing of science to bolster existing practice. Without a science base to support existing practices, the future of teaching as a profession may be in jeopardy (1). Already, administrators

are questioning the economic wisdom of employing departments of faculty to simply lecture to students. Why not, they ask, simply capture the very best lectures from all over the world on CD-ROM and present the same material to all students? In this context, all students would receive the same, extremely high quality of education.

The concern here is with the future of teaching as a profession. Can teachers be replaced by CD-ROMS? The future of teaching as a profession may depend, in part, on our scholarly pursuit of educational research. Shall we be technicians or shall we be professionals with a scientific basis to our work (1)? Can we perform research that will directly improve teaching and learning? Can we document the effectiveness of our strategies by professional-level research, or are we doomed to being second-class citizens in the academic community? Both great needs and great possibilities exist for research in teaching and learning. The challenge is awesome, even with its usually accepted limits. Unless major efforts are made in educational re-

search, students are doomed to learning with strategies where the science behind them is not as strong as the faith, and students and teachers will fall short of their potential (1).

Therefore, I challenge our colleagues to conduct research on the effectiveness of our teaching strategies. **Without a scientific knowledge base, teaching cannot claim and hold professional status, especially if our techniques are useless or obsolete.** Furthermore, no discipline can defend itself effectively against skepticism unless its procedures are based on scientific proof established by experimental research.

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1. **Basmajian JV.** Research or retrench: the rehabilitation professions challenged. *Phys Ther* 55: 607-610, 1975.