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A DIARY FROM THE FUTURE

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'A diary from the future' thinks through the positive social, environmental health effects of a large-scale transition to plant-based diets. These include changes for food production, consumption and food security, and with that, social justice, equity, education, poverty and the co-existence with other species. Even just the way the story thinks through and recognises these complex relationships and effects is an achievement and a novelty for physiotherapists in itself. Reaching well beyond this, however, this is also a story about how fear and darkness can turn into hope, optimism and curiosity for the future as a result of learning and thinking about these complex relationships. Finally, 'A diary from the future' is also a reflection on the possibilities of broadening our understanding of physiotherapy, of the need for change, resistance to it, and the creative potential that is released when these resistances are overcome.



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Dear diary,

Today we have had students on clinical placement here at work. They entered the lab one by one, a little insecure at first, but they quickly became less nervous. It was so nice to see their young faces full of creativity and passion light up every single room they went into. As one of the oldest physiotherapists in our workplace, several of them were very interested in talking to me about what physiotherapy was like before and what I had learned

in my physiotherapy training when I was young. It was so refreshing to see that everything we have fought for was meaningful, and it made me reflect on how much has actually changed.

It is hard to conceive that the world has changed so much in such a short time. When I started my studies, physiotherapy was mostly about working curatively and health-promoting, but the term "health" was narrow and

was mostly concerned with individuals. Now this is just one of the branches in physiotherapy. The physiotherapy revolution started slowly and increased gradually. One of the first major concepts that the first activists fought for was diet and the promotion of plant-based lifestyles. At first, they were met with ridicule and criticism. How in the world would a plant-based diet solve our problems and help us out of the climate crisis we were facing? The first activists were called fanatics and even liars. How could they claim that the best way to save the fish was to let them live in peace and not eat them? Who in the world had imagined that not eating animal products would give us a better basis for reducing injustice in the world?

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Many were skeptical that it should be physiotherapists, and not nutritionists

or climate scientists and doctors, who should call for a change of eating habits for the climate.

Obviously health was about more than just fixing problems and injuries after they had occurred. The early activists had a goal of preventing as many health problems as they could, before people were in danger of getting them at all. According to the physiotherapists, changes in the environment would have positive consequences for everyone living in it, not just those people who were more affected by climate change than others. One of the biggest things they fought for was the recognition that health was complex and interconnected, and could be directly affected by things we had control over, such as eating habits, and the environment around us. This seemed impossible to a world bound by ancient traditions. Nevertheless, the message eventually spread, and open-minded individuals began taking part in what we now refer to as "the green transition". As people felt less threatened by new ideas and thoughts of change, more and more people decided that they wanted to participate in the future.

The activists promoted the message that plant-based diets would lead to a healthier and greener planet. In the past, large quantities of soy had been grown to feed animals on farms, which would then be eaten in the following. Soybeans are full of protein, yet for many years we thought we could get more protein out of eating animals. Now we have cut out the "middleman"

and use both the soy, and all the other beans and vegetables we grow, to provide food for all people around the world. Because we no longer use space to keep animals for food production, or grow food for animals, we need less space to grow more food overall. And this type of food production does not require as much water as animal husbandry either! In many ways, we have seen that the plant-based diets have enabled much more responsible consumption and production. Now, even gas emissions in connection with animal husbandry are a thing of the past.

Never before had we seen a change that brought as much positives with it as the physiotherapy revolution and the green transition. The changes that the activists had anticipated were clear, and many people, especially those with food-related ailments, could enjoy a better everyday life due to better health. What the activists had not imagined the extensive ripple effects a changed diet could have! As we needed less space to grow more food, it turned out that we could ensure greater food production and feed larger portions of the population. When animal husbandry and the meat industry were no longer critical for food production, they also did not require as much economic subsidies. As a result, the cost of fruit, vegetables, beans and legumes began reflecting the actual cost of production. Food simply became cheaper and more accessible to more people. This was a big step in the right direction to eradicate hunger. As if this wasn't enough, the increased need for growing fruit and vegetables

led to more jobs opening up. This may sound like there were simply more farmers in the world, but it wasn't only that. As more people could benefit from a diet that led to better health, and more people could access food and find work, more people and their children could also set aside time and money for better education. This created economic growth, even beyond the fact that the meat industry was no longer subsidised, and food production became much cheaper through direct plant consumption. Who would have thought that? Along with economic growth and good education also came gender equality, and less inequality more generally speaking. We do not yet know whether these changes were direct effects of the green transition, but clear parallels have been drawn between them. When we learned to live with other species without exploiting them in uneconomical and destructive ways, equality became a natural part of the conversation. Why in the world would one treat someone (or something) differently, or perform actions that affect others directly without their consent? It became evident to us as humans, that if we were ever to live in peace with one another, we must also live in peace with other species. It was only then that the idea that different people, or animals, deserved different treatment disappear.

As larger parts of the world population had better economic standing, more access to food, the opportunity for good education and more equality, innovation and sustainable planning became a more natural part of everyday life. Large cities used more sustainable

energy, which led to less greenhouse gas emissions. Both the quality of water and air improved dramatically because of this. Cleaner water provided a better basis for life under water, but also life on land. Wildlife flourished, and this made nature around us greener. In addition, cleaner water and cleaner air meant that the weakest and poorest were no longer at risk of dying from infections due to poor sanitation. People with lung diseases could breathe easier and live better, because the air was not as polluted.

Slowly but surely, reduced pollution also led us to see changes in extreme weather. Simply put, there is now less of it, and this provides better living conditions for us and animals alike. Maybe we can even avoid more loss of biodiversity? In addition, we have seen positive changes in the arctic. Less pollution has led to a slowing down the exponential warming of the arctic. As a result, the people who live there, urban infrastructures and arctic animal species are no longer in immediate crisis. The ice does not melt at the same rate as before and where it does, this can be linked to normal seasonal changes again.

For many, the green transition has been a symbol of hope and it has led to more people having better mental health as well, especially young people. For several years before the physiotherapy revolution, younger people were anxious about the future, because it seemed so dark and uncertain. With these improvements came a sense of future positivity and curiosity. It was a light in the dark for many that allowed

for creativity and innovation, because there was a need to break outdated patterns. Some, who previously had difficulty finding their place, or feeling at home in society, found their place and contributions in the new society. Some started environmental groups with the goal of planting trees and flowers, while others put together legal movements to correct misleading advertising and literature that pretended to be for the good of the environment and health, but at the same time encouraged the destructive consumption of nature.

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Physiotherapy became a broad concept, because our view of health became more complex. Before, we thought that physiotherapy mainly

consisted of helping someone who has sustained an injury, and although this is still included in today's physiotherapy, it now consists of so much more. Physiotherapy is almost everything that can manipulate and affect health. It can be cooking classes, cleaning up rubbish in nature, planning infrastructure and roads that facilitate physical activity, legal action against harmful propaganda and a whole lot more. We are still doing clinical work, but this kind of work is not as dominant in our profession as it once was, simply because physical injuries are no longer as common in people's lives.

I do not think the first physiotherapists who started the movement fully understood the extent of what they were doing. We have seen many positive changes already, but it is far from over. Researchers and physiotherapists are constantly working to find alternatives to plastic, the use-and-discard society, and transportation methods. Few are still critical of further changes, but fortunately it seems that people are more open to innovation on the whole. We have realised that it is now or never.