



Pr. Patrick Loisel (1943–2022): A Pioneer, a Visionary Man, and Founding Father of Work Disability Prevention Research Field and Community

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Published online: 10 March 2023

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It is with great sadness that we learned of the death of Professor Patrick Loisel on Friday, August 26, 2022 in Montreal. Patrick was a pioneer, a visionary man and a founding father of the work disability prevention (WDP) research field and community. He inspired the work, career and lives of many students and researchers, with a deep sense of benevolence, dedication and simplicity. The community of work disability researchers that Patrick founded is in grief. Through these lines, we wish to honor his memory, as a tribute of gratitude for the impressive legacy he left us.

From Orthopaedic Surgery to Work Rehabilitation (1971–1995)

Professor Patrick Loisel received his MD degree in 1971 and his qualification in orthopaedic surgery in 1973 from the Faculty of Medicine of Paris VI (France). He practiced in Narbonne (France) in his early career, while participating in several research trips to London, New York, Montreal and Utrecht with the “Groupe de recherche sur l'appareil articulaire et locomoteur (GRAAL)”, whose acronym humorously illustrates a certain form of “quest for the Grail” through international research. Prof. Loisel immigrated to Quebec, Canada in 1983, where he was recognized as a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada in 1986. After post-graduate studies at

the University of Laval (Quebec city), he joined the University of Sherbrooke (Quebec) in 1985. As a full professor at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Sherbrooke, Prof. Loisel was involved in research, practice and teaching in work rehabilitation at Charles LeMoynes University Hospital (South shore Montreal). He was the head of the PREvention of work handiCAP (PREVICAP) multidisciplinary clinical research team in work disability prevention. He was appointed as president of the Scientific Council of the Quebec Research Network of Rehabilitation from 1995 to 1998 and was member of this network and of the HEALNet Research Network of Centers of Excellence Program of Canada. As president of the Quebec Commission for Evaluation of University Education Programs he contributed to the quality of university educational programs.

“As an orthopedic and spine surgeon, I was dissatisfied with the functional outcomes of many of my patients who had a lumbar spine surgery. It was clear that even excellent anatomical & imaging results of back surgery led not to acceptable outcomes including return to functional life and work. How should I break this deadlock? Should I follow the treatment recommended during my training and written in then-current orthopedic textbooks, or should I adopt a new way of treating my patients that was not yet conceived? I suspected what not to do but had to decide what to do. Resolving this conundrum was the rationale for developing the Sherbrooke model” [1].

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A Visionary Researcher Who Challenged the Status Quo

In the 1990's Prof. Loisel was a pioneer in the research field of WDP. Most of us will remember the key publication in 1997 of the so-called Sherbrooke model, an innovative intervention consisting of a clinical and workplace intervention to prevent work

disability among low back pain workers [2, 3]. At the time, the Sherbrooke model was based on the first clinical practice recommendations for the management of back pain from the Quebec Task Force “Spitzer Report” [4]. The Sherbrooke trial had the objective of evaluating whether these recommendations were relevant and effective. Indeed, they were. This breakthrough gave rise to a new work disability paradigm to manage occupational back pain [5]. The worker at the center, and all the players on the field: the workplace, the health professionals, and the insurance companies [6]. This change of perspective has been a true Copernican revolution, the consequences of which are less than fully realized [7]. Evaluation of the intervention by means of a randomized controlled trial allowed demonstration of its efficacy [3], then its cost–benefit [8]. Since then, the Sherbrooke model has been adapted and replicated in other countries with an impressive level of evidence [9, 10]. Following this world-renowned publication, Patrick’s research has continued to deepen the understanding, development and validation of programs and tools for the prevention of work disability for musculoskeletal disorders. He published more than 100 papers, with which he initiated as pioneer the emerging research field of WDP. These publications showed his visionary mind, his desire to put this vision to the test of reality, and eventually to share it for the benefit of all.

A Teacher and Founder of the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR) WDP Prevention Program (2003–2015)

On top of his unforgettable and invaluable research merits for the WDP research field, Patrick’s major contribution was his leadership to get funding, start and continue for 12 years an international 3-year WDP CIHR training program for PhD students and young researchers [11, 12]. More than 110 trainees from 14 countries all over the world and their 30 mentors were part of that program. The program started in 2003 at the Longueuil campus of the University of Sherbrooke (south shore of Montreal) and continued after six years at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health of the University of Toronto until 2015. Many young and senior researchers were privileged to have been part of this program, which resulted in a WDP research community that has grown rapidly and will last for the future.

In line with Prof. Loisel’s work disability paradigm, the major strength of this training was its transdisciplinary approach, that brought together students from 20 different disciplines. “Rigor, openness, tolerance”, such was the agenda. Each day in the morning forum a discussion was held with the students to review what they had learned or had inspired by the previous day. Students could bring in their so called “aha moments”. It was a joy to see Prof.

Loisel’s eyes twinkle at the mention of our discoveries, our surprises, and our amazement, which he shared with us.

As part of the midterm program evaluation in 2007 students were interviewed and focus groups were held [12]. Most appreciated aspects of the program by students were the networking with students and mentors from different countries and disciplines, and the group diversity (of experience, discipline, origin, type of research conducted). The small group format and interactions with mentors were praised, as was the uniqueness of the perspectives in the area of socio-political challenges.

“More than 110 trainees and their 30 program mentors created myriads of transdisciplinary connections and many will continue the work together. I hope they will bridge scientific, political, legal, and cultural realities to match science and policy in ways that can best serve the needs of work disabled citizens globally” [13].

A Founding Father of the WDP Research Field and Community

From ICOH Handicap, Work to ICOH Work Disability Prevention, Integration Committee WDPI, Milan 2006–Premus, and WDPI Conferences (2010–2019)

Professor Loisel convinced the board of the International Committee on Occupational Health (ICOH) that the ICOH committee Work & Handicap should be transformed to the ICOH committee Work Disability Prevention & Integration. He initiated and founded this new ICOH committee in Milan in 2006. Prof. Loisel was also the first chairman of the ICOH Scientific Committee on Work Disability Prevention and Integration (SC WDPI) committee. Thus, he placed WDPI within the ICOH and on the global map of occupational health. Since 2006 he (co-)organized various ICOH SC WDPI conferences in Angers (2010), Groningen (2012), Toronto (2014), Amsterdam (2016), and Odense (2019).

As a result of his activities concerning the ICOH WDPI committee and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) training program a new work disability prevention community started and has grown to a network of hundreds of researchers and practitioners from all over the world. He initiated also the Handbook of Work Disability Management & Prevention [13]. Fifty-six authors from eight countries contributed to this first –and to date only– evidence based handbook which comprehensively addresses the emerging field of work disability and its prevention and management. Today it has been downloaded more than 138,000 times. It is a state-of-the-art integrative critical review of the conceptual, methodological and practical aspects of WDP. Almost

all authors were part of the already mentioned unique international advanced training program in WPD funded by the CIHR.

Closing Words

Unfortunately, Prof. Loisel's health deteriorated in recent years and he was unable to continue his work and attend conferences. For this reason, at the last SC WDPI Conference in 2019 there was a tribute in honor of all his work and contributions to our research field and community. To express the gratitude to him and his legacy, the SC WDPI initiated the Professor Patrick Loisel Prize for the 'Best Oral Presentation by an Early Career Researcher' oral presentation and the 'Best Poster Presentation'. In this way, he will be remembered forever in the WDP research field and community. A tribute and personal video messages of his (former) students were recorded at the WDPI conference. Showing him the recordings of the tribute and video messages made Prof. Loisel very proud, his eyes twinkled again as they used to do as he discussed the AHA moments during the program with his students.

Many of us have lost a true friend with the passing of Patrick. He was always full of interest in his students and mentors. Prof. Loisel influenced the personal lives of hundreds of his students and colleagues all over the world. Patrick was a great researcher but even a better teacher: A teacher who learned from his students.

Une force qui va... These were the starting words of Prof. Loisel's obituary from his wife and family. These words were written by Patrick a few years ago about what drives him during his life and work. His words remind us of the rippling effect described by psychiatrist Irvin Yalom [14]. That is, 'the ripples that people create during their life may affect others for years, even for generations, like the ripples in a pond go on and on until they're no longer visible but continuing at a nano level'.

We are grateful to Patrick for his wisdom as a researcher and humbleness as a teacher. May we all be inspired by his humanity and altruism. Like ripples in the pond, his legacy will go on and will be passed on.

Une force qui va!

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