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**In Memoriam: Christine A. Nelson, PhD., OTR**

It is with much sadness that we report the recent passing of one of NDTA's Pediatric Coordinator Instructors.

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# NDTA Network

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## Clinician's Corner

### Who Owns the Research?

#### Theory vs. Philosophy in the NDT Debate

By Marcia Stamer, PT

Eavesdropping is an enjoyable pastime for many of us, and I am no exception. Restaurant conversations can be entertaining, and so can the many tidbits of information one can pick up walking among therapists at professional conferences. I would imagine that many of you have heard comments about NDT—both positive and negative—as you circulate at conferences; I personally find it rather a lot of fun if these comments are made when my identity as an NDT instructor remains unknown. I have learned what I would think are honest opinions in these circumstances.

Many of us have also attended meetings and conferences or received correspondence where more public opinions about NDT are offered. I will never forget staffing the NDTA™ booth at the Physical Therapy Combined Sections meeting in Nashville in 2004 when a faculty member of a university walked up and immediately said to me “I don't send any of my students on affiliations that teach about NDT because there is no research to support it.” Fortunately, although I am not known for my quick thinking and articulate responses under these conditions, I could just hand her Janet Howle's book, *Neuro-Developmental Treatment Approach: Theoretical Foundations and Principles of Clinical Practice*.

I tend to obsess over things, which helps me sort out difficult ideas over time. So I am obsessed by this problem of research—which brings me to the APTA's III STEP conference last year, some of the recent debates at the American Academy of Cerebral Palsy and Developmental Medicine regarding the efficacy of NDT, and some recent correspondence. It seems to me that one of the issues, although usually unnamed as an issue, is “Who owns the new theories and knowledge gained by the basic sciences?” This issue comes up when I hear people say, “The newer theories of motor control, such as Neuronal Group Selection Theory or new findings in plasticity research, are discussed in Howle's book about NDT. These theories aren't NDT, so those discussions don't belong in that book!”

Whoa!! Wait a minute! This is a huge error in understanding what NDT is and is not.

NDT is a treatment philosophy and a clinical practice model. It is not itself a basic science theory of motor development, motor control, motor recovery, or motor learning. Clinical models designed to structure therapy practice rely on scientific research and the interpretation of this research to constantly support, revise, and confirm or refute the model's philosophy. The diagram to the right shows this relationship.



efficient and functional movement for our patients now and in their futures.

The next issue of Network will further address the issue of NDT philosophy and practice in relation to the ever-evolving changes in our understanding of posture and movement. I would invite and encourage all readers to submit ideas for discussion and articles for consideration for inclusion into this issue.

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