Swimming as part of the education of the physically handicapped.

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Far too often, in hospital rehabilitation, attention is paid only to the paralysed or injured limb and frequently the physical education of the whole patient is neglected. Swimming not only involves all the major muscle groups in the body, but it also can have a marked effect upon cardiovascular endurance. The ability to move the body with any degree of skill can provide an important outlet to the healthy child. For the handicapped child, this chance of accomplishing successfully a physical skill can have an educational value, not only in giving him confidence, but also in letting him find a way of using what muscles are available in an enjoyable manner.

Five subjects, ranging in age from eleven to twenty four years, were given weekly swimming sessions in the College indoor swimming pool. They all suffered from cerebral palsy, two being confined to wheelchairs, the others, though severely handicapped being able to move around to a limited extent on crutches. The subject matter of each lesson was geared to the individual needs of each patient, and had to be varied from week to week. One assistant was allocated to each patient until the patient was able to swim unaided, when he was encouraged to progress at his own rate, with help and encouragement.

All showed a marked improvement in swimming ability at the end of a few months, and some were able to swim lengths unaided. All gained a great deal of confidence in the water, and also in other aspects of their everyday life, appearing more happy and contented at home and at work. There also seemed to be some physiological gain, in for example the range of movement of joints.

The work in this project is described from the viewpoint of the educationist rather than from that of the therapist.