To the Editors:

**Primary writing tremor**

*Ceylon Medical Journal, 2000; 45: 137-138*

Primary writing tremor (PWT) is a task-specific tremor that occurs solely or predominantly on writing. We describe two patients with this rare condition.

A 58-year old school principal presented with tremor of the right hand of 10 years’ duration. It appeared when writing on paper and on the blackboard, and persisted throughout the act of writing. It worsened progressively to affect his professional activities. Another patient, a 29-year old clerk presented with a similar tremor of 15 years’ duration. He also had hyperhidrosis of both palms and soles since childhood. In neither did the tremor appear with other actions like shaving, feeding or typing. The other hand was normal. There was no relevant family history. Examination did not reveal any neurological signs. The two patients showed improvement with primidone and propranolol respectively.

Many neurological conditions, including benign essential tremor, Parkinson’s disease and cerebellar disease may produce tremor when writing. The tremor may also occur at rest, on adopting certain postures, or when performing other activities with the hands. Such patients have other neurological signs as well. PWT characteristically manifests solely on writing. However, a minority have some tremor while performing other activities as well. It may occur only at the beginning of writing or persist throughout the act (1). The tremor can have either a sinusoidal or a 7 Hz from the arm muscles (1,3). Few show improvement with alcohol. Propranolol, primidone and anticholinergic drugs are beneficial (3).

Few other conditions mimic PWT. Benign essential tremor, a postural tremor, resembles PWT in many aspects, but is not task-specific. Writer’s cramp is the commonest condition that causes difficulty when writing. It is recognised by the characteristic dystonic arm posture. PWT of the jerky type may also be mistaken for myoclonic jerks of focal and segmental myoclonus. However, these jerks occur spontaneously, and persist even during sleep.

![Image of handwriting](image)

Figure. Sample of handwriting and drawing (Archimedes spiral and zig-zag lines) with the affected hand of patient 1, showing the effect of the tremor.

**References**


A T Alibhoy¹, U K Ranawaka¹ and J C Wijesekera², ¹Senior Registrars and ²Neurologist, Institute of Neurology, *The National Hospital of Sri Lanka, Colombo.*