



physical therapy AND YOU

BY DAVID J. CONTI, DPT, NCS, CSCS

physical therapy: a demanding, rewarding profession

The process of becoming a physical therapist can be an overwhelming endeavor. With structure, however, it becomes more manageable and achievable. You would be hard pressed to find a Physical Therapist program in 2018 that did not offer a doctorate (DPT) as the terminal degree. That said, a bachelor's degree is most commonly listed as a prerequisite to the application process, with a minimum overall GPA requirement and frequently an even higher GPA requirement in the courses deemed preparatory and germane to physical therapy practice.

There is also a list of specific prerequisite courses that will be necessary as well. It would be most efficient if the undergraduate degree is in a concentration of study that is strongly associated with PT and offers most, if not all of the required courses. In addition, applicants must complete a specific number of clinical observation hours, which varies from school to school. It is generally considered closest to optimal if these experiences are broad and include multiple settings that PTs work in.

The most competitive applicants have volunteered in three or more settings, which may include hospitals, outpatient facilities, schools, skilled nursing facilities or even home care. Following acceptance into a graduate school DPT program, students must complete a rigorous three years of additional study, which includes roughly 40 weeks of clinical rotations in a variety of the aforementioned settings. These direct clinical experiences along the way, afford the PTs the opportunity to find their niche. The benefit of variety is that it exposes students to more of their options. Upon completion of the program, the student is eligible to sit for the national licensure exam. Once this exam is successfully completed, the licensed physical therapist is ready to seek employment and embark on a career of dynamic and inspiration interactions.

“WHY PHYSICAL THERAPY?”

The path of a prospective physical therapist is pretty straightforward. It's the path to that path that makes all the difference in the resulting quality and potential of the licensed clinician. It's for that very reason that, when hiring a PT, I'm sure to include the question “Why physical therapy?” in the interview process.

I've heard answers ranging from “early exposure to the profession,” to “the urge to help people,” to “the practicality of a career with job security.” Indeed, I know therapists who chose profession after reading a magazine article ranking it the most stable and best paying career choice. Some answers to this question are better than others, but it's been my overwhelming experience that the best of the best are those who are passionate and committed to making a difference.

MY OWN PATH

My path to physical therapy was established relatively early in my life. As I reflect on it, I can remember having only two career dreams. One was to be the starting quarterback for the New York Giants and the other a physical therapist. While the first of these was admittedly a lofty, highly improbable, if not impossible goal, it was understandable coming from the ambitious mind of a ten-year-old-boy.

The latter more realistic, thoughtful, and ultimately suitable goal came a few years later. For as long as I can remember, I've participated in sports. As is common with many athletes, sports can frequently be the introduction to injury. I was certainly no exception, as I had my fair share of nicks and bruises along the way; none more significant than the story that I'm about to share.

I was the quarterback, not of the NY Giants, but of the Midwood Hornets in Brooklyn, NY. It was the last game of a mediocre season, which meant that we were simply playing for pride. Unfortunately, some of the team had mentally checked out, which is a great way to leave teammates hanging out to dry. Long story short: a blitzing, behemoth of a linebacker came untouched on my blind side, hurling me violently to the turf. The problem was, my foot didn't get the memo that ‘we’ were going down. It stayed firmly, and stubbornly planted in the artificial surface, yielding an avulsion fracture of my left ankle.

This led to my introduction to structured rehabilitation in the form of physical therapy. I worked harder than ever to heal and return to the field for my senior campaign. I developed an appreciation for my PT as well as for the nature of his work. He seemed engaged and very interested in the entire process. For lack of a better expression, it just seemed like a really cool job and I wanted in. From that point forward, I researched the path and slowly but surely navigated my way to and through physical therapy school.

I'm now in my twelfth year as a clinician and am currently in a position to help so many people, while doing something that I truly enjoy. I have also developed a sensitivity to my adolescent patients, for obvious reasons. I have opened my clinic's doors for internships, observers, and clinical affiliations. I figure, if my passion shows, then perhaps I can inspire the next amazing PT to do even greater things. I couldn't be more pleased with the process, and as crazy as it sounds, I have even developed a healthy appreciation for blitzing linebackers.

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Located at 1300 Corporation Parkway, Raleigh, NC, 27610 Suite B, RBR PT treats patients from infants to geriatrics. RBR PT is known as an inclusive clinic and a strong community resource. (919) 917-7729 or RBRPT.com for more information