

Tuesday, Apr 17, 2018

Students learn from patients and caregivers at physical therapy workshop

With a focus on promoting a community-based approach to health education, students and leaders in the Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) program at Oakland University and the Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA) program at Baker College of Auburn Hills came together in OU's Human Health Building to talk with individuals who have neurological impairments.

The intra-professional workshop marked the first such collaboration between the two schools, according to Visiting Instructor of Physical Therapy, Jacqueline Scully, who helped coordinate the event for Oakland, along with Associate Professor of Physical Therapy, Deb Doherty.

"Healthcare is so much of a team effort now, whereas 25 years ago, we kind of worked in our own little silos," Scully said. "We have to start getting students used to working with each other now so they'll be ready for that when they get into the workforce."

She added that the experience can also dispel misconceptions students may have about what it's like to work with patients who have neurological impairments.

"I think it helps just being able to sit down with the patients, as well as their caretakers, and get a better understanding of who they are and they're going through."

The patients at the intra-professional workshop had all suffered strokes and are all participants in OU's Bridge the Gap Program. This community initiative pairs second- and third-year physical therapy students with patients in need of physical therapy to help treat neurological impairments. Students perform the physical therapy – under supervision of a licensed physical therapist – as part of their neurological interventions classes.

Emily Pietraniec, a Doctor of Physical Therapy student who has participated in Bridge the Gap, said that intra-professional collaboration between DPT and PTA students is a natural fit.

"We've had inter-professional education with medical and nursing students before, but never anything with PTA students. And they're actually the ones we'll be working with the closest," she said. "It opens up good communication and allows both sides to show what they can offer."

DPT student Ben McCown noted that while he worked with licensed PTA's during one of his clinical internships, this was his first interaction with PTA students.

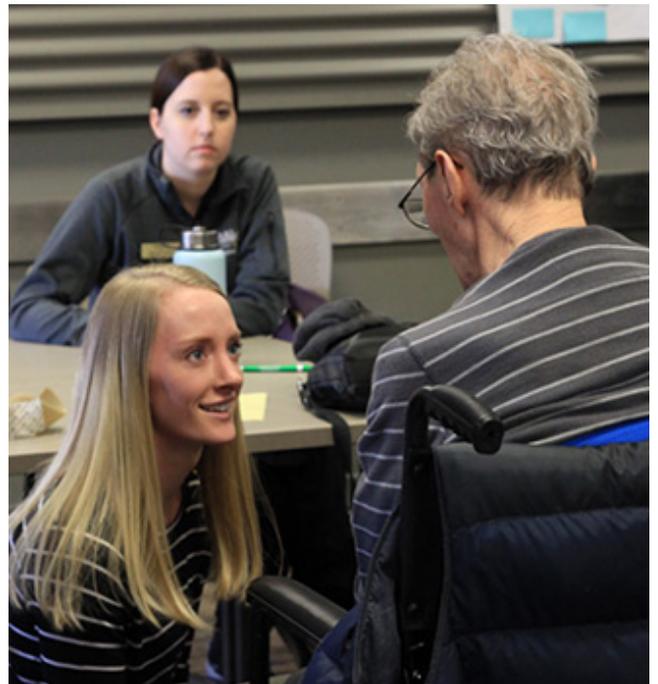
"This was a great opportunity to bring two parts of the profession together," he said. "We're going to be graduating pretty close together and working with some of the same patients toward the same goals. For us, it's really about learning how to work together to achieve the best outcome for the patients."

At the intra-professional event, students listened to patients and their spouses discuss their experiences dealing with the life-altering effects of neurological impairment – from time spent in hospitals and rehabilitation centers, to daily challenges of life at home and in the community.

Clarkston residents Philip and Carrolann Paradise were among those who shared their story with students. In 2013, Philip suffered a stroke that left him unable to walk.



OU Doctor of Physical Therapy student Amy Quinnan interacts with a patient at the intra-professional workshop for OU and Baker College students.



OU Doctor of Physical Therapy student Emily Pietraniec talks with patient Philip Paradise.

wife learned about from another participant in the program.

“It’s a wonderful program,” said Carrolann. “I wish all the colleges had it, but they don’t.”

She said her husband has benefited from the therapy, both physically and emotionally. He especially enjoys watching students learn from the experience.

“Of all the places we’ve gone to, we find that the students really have a heart for him,” she said. “One of the major issues right now is that there aren’t enough neuro PT’s. And by coming here, we get a chance to encourage people to go into neuro, so that we can get better services for Phil and other neuro patients.”

According to a [2017 Huffington Post article](#), more than 100 million Americans — close to a third of the total population — suffer from neurological diseases such as Alzheimer’s, Multiple Sclerosis, migraines, epilepsy and spinal cord injury. These conditions put a financial strain on the health care system, to the tune of [nearly \\$800 billion in annual costs](#). Not all those costs are covered by insurance – which was one of many topics discussed at the intra-professional workshop.

“We talked about how insurance will only cover certain treatments and how that can be hard to deal with,” said PTA student Lauren Vanderhoff. “There’s also the daily activities of getting out of bed and getting around in the community. You have to really prepare and have a plan of what you’re going to do and how you’re going to get there.”

PTA student Kameron Joostberns said that hearing from patients and caregivers also gave him insight into the challenges they face.

“Something that most people wouldn’t think twice about, such as travel or vacation accommodations, is so noticeable to them,” he said. “It really does affect not just the patient, but the whole family.”

Vanderhoff added, “It’s important to recognize that the caregivers are going through this process with the patients, and they may be experiencing their own physical or emotional issues. So, going to support groups is not only for the patients, it’s for the caregivers too.”

Baker’s Academic Coordinator of Clinical Education, Susan Tomica, said the event gave the PTA students an opportunity to build on textbook and classroom instruction.

“These students are in their first semester of our PTA program, so they’re learning about concepts right now,” she said. “To be able to come here and see someone with real impairments share their experience is very valuable for them.”



The intra-professional workshop featured 34 Doctor of Physical Therapy students and one Occupational Therapy student from OU, and 24 Physical Therapist Assistant students from Baker College of Auburn Hills.



All of the patients at the intra-professional workshop are also participants in OU's Bridge the Gap program, which pairs second- and third-year Doctor of Physical Therapy students with patients who have suffered neurological impairments.



Seven patients and their spouses visited Oakland University to share their experiences dealing with the life-altering effects of stroke.