

PT Education Time Line

Excerpts from Dr. Moffat's Presidential Address at Physical Therapy '96: Scientific Meeting and Exposition of the American Physical Therapy Association; Minneapolis, Minn; June 14, 1996. Copyright 1996 by the American Physical Therapy Association.

Education History

1921 – 1926

Physical therapy education saw the continued development of educational programs from the initial programs at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, and Walter Reed Hospital. The graduates of these reconstruction aide programs were graduate nurses and physical education persons who were called to duty to begin to manage the devastating effects of the first World War. The development of those reconstruction aides during the period 1914 to 1917 laid the basis for the profession we now know as physical therapy. It is interesting to note that these individuals were certificate holders prior to becoming reconstruction aides.

1927 – 1936

Physical therapy education saw the development of the first standards for accreditation for physical therapy education programs in 1928. Interestingly, in 1933, the American Physiotherapy Association asked the American Medical Association to assist with the accreditation of our education programs, an alliance that became fraught with multiple problems until we could extricate ourselves from the relationship 44 years later.

1937 – 1946

Physical therapy education saw the Schools Section meeting regularly and an increasing movement of physical therapist education from primarily certificate programs, which had modeled the teacher education programs, to university-based baccalaureate programs. Education was to receive, for many years, support from the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis.

1947 – 1956

Physical therapy education was impacted by the passage of the Allied Health Professions Training Act in 1953. The baccalaureate degree was identified as the minimum degree for entry-level physical therapist education, and in 1956, baccalaureate programs represented the majority of education programs. The Association prepared a revised set of accreditation standards in 1952 and then waited for AMA approval, which did not come forth until 1956, and that was only of a diluted version of the revision. The only significant change that AMA adopted was to actively allow APTA to be involved with the accreditation process. This was also the decade in which the first major study of physical therapy education and practice was funded by the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and directed by Dr Catherine Worthingham.

1957 – 1966

Physical therapy education was marked by the development of the first 2-year graduate program in physical therapy at Case Western Reserve University in 1960. Curricular emphasis included not only the traditional aspects of physical therapy education, but also increased emphasis on public health concerns, educational principles, administration, and behavioral sciences. The passage of the Health Professions Education Act under the Kennedy Administration paved the way for the development of assistant levels of personnel to meet the demands for service provision and to help reduce the costs of services to the American public.

1967 – 1976

Physical therapy education history was marked by the development of the foundations of physical therapist assistant education. Howard University, in Washington, DC, established the first physical therapy program in a historically black college or university and graduated eight students in 1974. The Board of Directors established a task force to evaluate entry-level education over a 3-year period of time. The first study by Worthingham on physical therapy education and practice was published in six parts from 1968 to 1970. Worthingham also completed her second major study of physical therapy education and predicted that future professional education would lead primarily to a graduate degree.

1977 – 1986

Physical therapy education noted the historical recognition of APTA by the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation as a second independent accrediting agency in 1977. In 1979, the APTA House of Delegates adopted the resolution that entry-level education for the physical therapist be that which results in the award of a postbaccalaureate degree, and in 1983, APTA became the sole accrediting agency for physical therapy programs.

1987 – 1996

Physical therapy education noted the establishment of physical therapist professional doctoral education programs at Creighton University, the University of Southern California, and Slippery Rock University. Consensus conferences spanning several years finally began to delineate the curricular practice expectations, the curriculum, the curricular content, and the clinical education content of physical therapist professional education. Postbaccalaureate professional programs now exceeded in number baccalaureate programs.

2000

*From APTA web site

APTA Vision Sentence for Physical Therapy 2020

By 2020, physical therapy will be provided by physical therapists who are doctors of physical therapy, recognized by consumers and other health care professionals as the practitioners of choice to whom consumers have direct access for the diagnosis of, interventions for, and prevention of impairments, functional limitations, and disabilities related to movement, function, and health.