

PAST PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Transitioning to New Leadership in OHSIG

Rick Wickstrom, PT, DPT

The Combined Sections Meeting (CSM) 2025 in Houston, Texas was a satisfying in my volunteer role as President of the Occupational Health SIG in APTA Orthopaedic from 2019-2025. Our leadership team met to define application policies and procedures for a new Occupational Health Research Grant Award that engages OHSIG members who are DPT faculty, students, and clinicians in applied research relevant to occupational health. We engaged in OHSIG's sponsored educational session led by David Hoyle that was titled, *The Physical Therapist's Role in Disability Prevention through Mitigating Psychosocial Barriers through Return to Work*. We honored the service of great volunteers at the award ceremony for APTA Orthopaedic. We welcomed Judy Hess to her new role as APTA Orthopaedic President.

As I reflect on initiative highlights during my time as OHSIG President, I look forward to new directions we will experience as OHSIG members under your next OHSIG President, Steve Allison, PT, DPT. I began my first term in 2019 with an outcome in mind to establish an Occupational Health Practitioner (OHP) certificate program as a center point for excellence and recognition for OHSIG members. I was frankly frustrated with the slow progress to advance excellence and recognition for our specialty niche. I valued the inclusive leadership by APTA Orthopaedic President, Joe Donnelly who invited all SIG Presidents to align initiatives with the strategic framework for the APTA Orthopaedic. Lori Michener helped me design our OHP certificate program with the APTA Orthopaedic independent study course model and apply for the innovation grant. Karen Snowden shared her wisdom after developing a similar certificate program in the APTA Pelvic Health Academy. Guy Simoneau and Sharon Klinski were an amazing tag team of editors as we evolved our courses. Many colleagues stepped up to contribute, while faced with challenges from COVID, personal lives, and work lives. A summary of initiative highlights that we accomplished over the past 6 years includes:

- Published a Clinical Practice Guideline to Optimize Work Performance
- Implemented Occupational Health Certificate Program
- Inspired APTA to become a NIOSH Total Worker Health Affiliate
- Initiated an AOPT Motion led by James Spencer to inspire entry-point access
- Implemented a state liaison program to support our members where they practice
- Inspired the APTA Orthopaedic to make student membership free
- Collaborated on peer reviews with ACOEM to reinforce the value of Physical Therapy

- Launched an OHSIG sponsored occupational research grant award

As I am considering the direction for my next chapter of service, you can count on my active engagement to move our profession forward at the entry-point of health promotion and primary care with greater autonomy and payment than under traditional insurance plans. During CSM 2025, it was a thrill to vote for a new definition for primary care and hear exciting news from our new APTA President Kyle Covington that the APTA Federal's petition for Primary Care specialty certification will be sponsored by the APTA Board of Directors in the next House of Delegates. Military physical therapists continue to lead by example to advance access and opportunities at the entry-point of care over the past 50 years.

The Member Spotlight for this edition of OPTP will be focused on your next OHSIG President, Steve Allison, PT, DPT. Steve has been my sidekick and sounding board for most of my time as OHSIG President. He helped author and review monographs for our OHP Certificate Program and was among the first cohort to qualify for the OHSIG Occupational Health Practitioner Certificate. He leads the charge obtaining letters from PT State Licensing Boards to clarify that physical therapists are qualified within our scope of practice to perform Department of Transportation (DOT) Physical Examinations to evaluate the fitness for duty of commercial vehicle drivers. Buckle up as you experience his populist sense of humor!

Incoming OHSIG President Spotlight

Steve Allison, PT, DPT, CME

Dr. Allison graduated in 1993 with a Bachelor of Science degree in physical therapy (PT) from Louisiana State University Medical Center. He went on to complete a Master of Health Sciences degree from Louisiana State University School of Allied Health Professions in 1998, and a post-professional doctorate degree in PT in 2007 from the University of St. Augustine.

Dr. Allison is a Gulf War Army Veteran, certified DOT medical examiner for the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, and a certified occupational health practitioner through APTA Orthopaedic.

Dr. Allison served as the lead author of the Functional Capacity Examination (FCE) best practices guideline adopted by the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) in April 2018. He has also authored and/or contributed to other articles and monographs related to FCE, job analysis, medical fitness for duty, and a clinical practice guideline for work rehabilitation.

Dr. Allison has been recognized in various federal courts and district courts in Louisiana and Colorado as an expert in FCEs, functional job analysis, functional test validation, and orthopedic physical therapy. He has provided expert testimony in over 110 cases to date with several more depositions scheduled next month.



Steve Allison, PT, DPT, CME
Occupational Health Practitioner

1. What inspired you to become a Physical Therapist and specialize in Occupational Health?

I actually stumbled across the physical therapy profession in a college catalog at Louisiana Tech University back in 1988. I spent some volunteer time in a small private practice, and I especially enjoyed the challenges of working with injured workers receiving workers' compensation benefits. After completing my entry-level degree in physical therapy, I spent a lot of time performing job fitness exams and functional job analysis. As time went on, I grew an expanding referral base for FCEs. The rest is history. I've spent the majority of my professional career in private practice specializing in occupational health services, and I especially love the challenge of expert witness work.

2. What is your current service focus for occupational health?

The primary occupational health service focus for my private practice is FCEs and expert witness work. However, we also provide other services such as DOT physical exams, non-DOT physical exams, employment drug screens and breath alcohol testing, impairment evaluations, job fitness exams, functional job analysis, functional test validation, ergonomic job surveys, and work conditioning. My practice is unique in that we do not accept any private health insurance plans. Our payor sources are limited to workers' compensation carriers, attorneys, employers, and a contract with the State Vocational Rehabilitation Office.

3. What do you love most about your occupational health practice?

I love being self-employed and not being bogged down by a ton of bureaucratic red tape. This allows me and my team to move quickly on potential opportunities for personal, professional, and corporate growth.

4. What frustrates you most about your practice environment?

The workers' compensation system has been broken for the 30+ years I have been in practice. Denials and delays in approval for physical therapy services by workers' compensation carriers is much too common resulting in delayed worker recovery, increased costs to employers, and unnecessary worker disability. Physical therapy practices partnering with employers to serve as entry-point musculoskeletal providers will solve

this problem by realizing a reduction in workplace injuries (prevention), faster recovery from workplace injuries (appropriate intervention), reduced costs to employers (fiscal responsibility), and mitigating measures of disability (disability management).

5. What regulatory or organizational changes are needed to promote value in occupational health practice?

From a regulatory and organizational perspective, I think the primary opportunities we should focus on over the next 3 years as a healthcare profession promoting autonomous practice are: (1) direct access to physical therapists as entry-point musculoskeletal providers under workers' compensation; (2) clarification of physical therapy education, qualifications, and scope of practice to perform DOT physical exams in all 50 states; (3) clarification of physical therapy education, qualifications, and scope of practice to be recognized as an "acceptable medical source" instead of an "other medical source" by the Social Security Administration in disability claims; and (4) clarification of physical therapy scope of practice to perform pre-participation physical exams in school districts in all 50 states.

6. How do you hope to position your practice in the next 5 years?

Haha! Well, if we can accomplish everything we should be pushing for in response to question #5, my practice will need to expand clinic sites, and hire a staff of at least 60 talented Physical Therapists/Physical Therapist Assistants who share an enthusiasm to work with integrity and enjoy the spoils of success!

Need an OHP Jumpstart for Direct to Employer Contracts?

Reimbursement, Access, Authorization and Patient Advocacy are issues that restrict physical and occupational therapists from practicing at their full scope of expertise. PTs/OTs on social media platforms are wondering what path would make a difference for their patients and careers. The Occupational Health Practitioner (OHP) Certification was created by the AOPT Occupational Health SIG exactly for this reason.

Expanding your skillset with OHP Certification will liberate your practice from traditional insurance headaches with a plethora of new tools, such as: Functional Job Analysis, Job Fitness Exams, Job Coaching, Early Intervention, Workplace Wellness, and Work Rehab to advance worker participation and well-being from hire to retire.

OHP Certification includes mentorship to foster delivery of D2E therapy services that focus on Total Worker Health. OHSIG members who achieve the OHP educational certificate are promoted in a Directory Search to generate service referral for their occupational health focus. Break free from the post-injury episodes of care. Prevent injuries, make employee lives better, and reignite your own passion as a health professional in a financially stable environment. To request more information, email: orthoisc@orthopt.org.