

## "Back in the Saddle"

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I want to start this President's update with a big thank you to Lori Michener, Vice President of the Academy of Orthopaedic Physical Therapy (AOPT) for her tireless efforts in carrying out the duties and responsibilities of President during my medical leave. I want to thank the Orthopaedic Academy Board of Directors and staff for their unwavering support during this time as well. I am so proud to work with this amazing group of individuals. On April 1, 2020, I transitioned back into my leadership role as the AOPT President 12 weeks post emergency L5 decompression on January 7, 2020, and L5-S1 spinal fusion and reconstruction on January 8, 2020, for Cauda Equina Syndrome. I distinctly remember asking the neurosurgeon on the morning of January 9th if I would be able to go to Denver for CSM? Obviously he said absolutely not! Missing CSM was more difficult than I could have ever imagined.

I began my physical therapy controlled mobility rehabilitation program at week 4 with some hesitation from the surgeon but I promised to behave (and I did). At week 10, I was ready to return to my professional role and was notified that I would be working virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was disappointing but necessary, however my first thought was about my own physical therapy treatments and progression. I needed to get moving; I would be off spinal pre-cautions at week 12. I was so ready to get back to life.

The COVID-19 virus was really novel in the United States at this time and there was a lot of dialogue happening on social media; some good and some very embarrassing for our profession. Were we essential or non-essential? Who should be open? Who should be closed? I was very determined that I was going to get my physical therapy. On March 20, 2020, APTA President, Sharon Dunn demonstrated strong leadership and addressed COVID-19 head on with a letter to APTA members. There were two sentences in this letter that triggered a significant opportunity for reflection; *"I hope that this uncertain time brings us together—as a nation, as a community, as an association—by showing us how connected we are, and how much we depend on each other. And I hope that our profession will do what it does best: help our society move on from a period of suffering, by restoring function,*

*independence, and dignity to survivors."* A call to action to make sure we did not lose sight of who we are for society. I was viewing this letter through the lens of a patient and that is exactly what my physical therapist was doing for me. I will share with you my experience as a patient during these unprecedented times.

I was a patient in physical therapy (Mercer University Physical Therapy) at the time of "shelter in place" orders and was observing the changes that were happening in the clinic to provide safe, effective, and efficient care. These changes were being driven by physical therapists who knew patients like me could not be abandoned during these unprecedented (new favorite word) times. Discussions and meetings took place, signs went up, and physical therapy services were being delivered. I was treated just like every other patient entering the clinic each visit. I was asked the same 5 questions, my forehead temperature was taken with a laser thermometer, physical therapists were in masks, I was washing my hands and physical therapists were washing their hands before treatment, and all equipment was being cleaned while the patient observed the process at the end of their visit. Both the patient and his or her physical therapist were washing their hands at the end of the visit. I felt safe and continue to feel safe as it is May 15, 2020, and I am still receiving physical therapy two times weekly and progressing very nicely according to my physical therapists. And I am still behaving! I am sharing this story with you to support the notion that we are always essential to someone in society, and individuals like me depend on our services so we can return to function and life.

It is now July and my hope is that we have learned so much more about COVID-19 and how to minimize its effects in our lives. I wear a mask for you; I wash my hands for you and me, and I avoid taking risks that would expose me and those I love to the virus. My hope is that during this pandemic and on the other side of it that we are a kinder, gentler society that has empathy and compassion for those who are suffering. I strongly believe as a profession we need to be as flexible and adaptable as possible to get through this together. Continued advocacy for telehealth services and payment for this delivery of care will

be necessary. The art and science of Physical Therapy must prevail.

The AOPT BOD have been actively engaged in the COVID-19 multi-Section/Academy Task Force and supported these efforts to provide resources to members through the APTA Learning Center and Communities. We know that many members have been affected by COVID-19 personally, professionally, and financially. We have been discussing strategies to help our members and hope to finalize some of these initiatives this month at our BOD Meeting. We will meet virtually to protect each other and the Orthopaedic Academy's financial resources. The AOPT staff have developed initiatives to provide continuing education resources at reduced costs and will continue to investigate opportunities to assist AOPT members.

Remember that the slate of candidates for AOPT BOD and Nominating Committee will be presented in July and AOPT **voting will now be in August**. Special Interest group elections will take place in November as usual. Stay well and safe!