



AMERICAN COUNCIL OF ACADEMIC PHYSICAL THERAPY

Proposal

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Title: Final Report from the Task Force on Clinician Engagement in Academic Physical Therapy

Problem / Opportunity:

The need for strong academic-clinical partnerships in PT education is well-established.

The American Council on Academic Physical Therapy's (ACAPT) [Excellence Framework](#), calls for promotion of authentic, collaborative and inclusive community partnerships. To achieve this, academic programs must cultivate and sustain meaningful relationships through investment in and collaboration with clinical educators.

The National Study of Excellence and Innovation (Jensen et al.) highlights the importance of equitable relationships with each partner feeling equally valued, represented and engaged.

In recent years, the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA), ACAPT and the APTA Academy of Education have worked to increase clinical partner engagement in initiatives and events related to academic physical therapy. Despite many efforts, the profession is still far from achieving its vision of fully integrated academic-clinical partnerships, as evidenced by the results of ACAPT's 2022 Institutional Profile Survey where 93% of respondents reported only 1-25% of their clinical partners were actively engaged with their academic program.

This task force worked to build consensus on partnership relationships between clinical facilities and academic institutions that support clinical education of entry-level physical therapists and physical therapist assistants.

The approach used by the group was anchored in a model of consensus building called Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Briefly, an AI consensus building process has four steps:

- Discovery – understanding the best of what currently exists;
- Dream – understanding capacity by describing what could be;
- Design – focusing on discussion of possibilities generated; and
- Delivery – what do we do in the immediate?

Proposed Solution / Recommendation:

Small semi-structured focus groups were used to understand the discovery and dream phases; a large consensus group during an ELC presentation was used to support the design phase. Upon completion of the focus groups and ELC presentation, four themes were identified:

1. A culture of education in the organization
2. Strong relationships are local relationships
3. Presence of a recognition infrastructure
4. Communication

A culture of education in the organization: There appears to be a relationship between those clinical educators who have a more defined culture of teaching and learning in their clinical organizations and those who had higher levels of engagement with their academic partners.

Strong relationships are local relationships: The task force learned that the strongest relationships are local relationships. Clinicians indicated that their meaningful relationships were with their local academic partners. Engagement with regional consortia varied across regions and often was facilitated by their local academic partner.

Presence of a recognition infrastructure: Clinical educators want to be recognized. Recognition can come at multiple levels – national, regional, and local. Suggestions about the type of recognition included (but were not limited to) being provided additional leave time, awards, certifications, and financial incentives such as support to attend conferences.

Communication: Open and flexible communication between academic and clinical partners can improve outcomes for all stakeholders.

Through the process, both during the recruitment phase and focus groups, it was identified that most clinicians are not familiar with ACAPT and those who are familiar have limited knowledge about the resources offered by ACAPT. For those who are very familiar with ACAPT, there were questions about the new organizational structure and how regional consortia would be recognized.

Recommendations for Consideration:

- ACAPT become a part of local partnerships
 - By ACAPT becoming part of local partnerships, clinician awareness of the organization will increase. Clinicians are currently most comfortable with local partnerships, and those partnerships could be used to increase exposure to the national structure.
- New ACAPT organizational structure to include regional consortia under the Clinical Education Commission
- Develop a recognition for excellence in clinical education programs and for individual clinical instructors.
- Leadership development for regional consortia
- Further investigation on the facilitators and barriers for clinical organizations' development of an explicit culture of teaching and learning
 - Resource development to help foster cultures of teaching and learning in the clinical environment.

The findings and recommendations of this task force reinforce previous work related to collaboration in clinical education: systematic efforts to coordinate a top-down and bottom-up efforts to improve partnership at all levels (Howman et al, 2018).

Implementation Timing / Window of Opportunity:

With the new reorganizational structure, the task force feels this may be an opportune time for the Clinical Education Commission to implement the recommendations in this report. These findings may be used to help guide the Commission in its organizational development. These findings may assist the new Commission to engage clinicians at both the national and regional consortia levels.

Comments:

While the task force has completed the work related to the charge, we identified additional areas of development to foster clinical and academic partnerships. There are several members of this task force who have a passion for clinical and academic partnerships and would like to be considered for any future projects related to this or to further this work. The task force feels it could expand upon the work already completed to make more specific recommendations for implementation.

During this process, the task force determined that there are several groups exploring clinical and academic relationships. We believe it would be beneficial to foster communication among the individuals/groups to enhance efforts and avoid duplication.