



# PHYSICAL THERAPIST ASSISTANT PROGRAM ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

## PTA PROGRAM UPDATE

### **Thanks for the memories!**

After 24 years at Mercer, the time has come to head west to “the Land of Enchantment!” Many different factors have caused me to decide that as of June 1, 2020, I will no longer be a faculty member at Mercer. As many are aware, I have been vacationing in New Mexico for more than 30 years and have always said that I go there for my soul. Well, my soul is now demanding that I pursue that dream and live there permanently. I am excited at the prospect of so much blue sky and sunshine (285+ days per year), no humidity in the summer months and being surrounded by the culture that I love so much. I will continue to indulge in the crafts that some of you have observed and most likely still teach an online course or two, but not be a full time faculty member.

Working with the learners in the PTA program has been quite a trip! Many of you have come into my office initially wondering if you would ever be able to master physical agents, goniometry, or the NPTE, and have gone on to be phenomenal clinicians! I have enjoyed the challenges that you have brought along with you and sharing your lives with you too! Some of you have been gracious enough to share your likenesses in the pages of the texts that have been published, and can hopefully look back upon those as positive experiences.

I have had a hand in the academic preparation of over 400 PTAs throughout the Delaware Valley! I sincerely enjoy seeing evidence of this in my travels to various continuing education courses and conferences throughout the area and country! I’ve heard nothing but great things about our MCCC PTAP alumni! I’m not surprised, all of you have worked hard to be who you are today. Keep up the great work!

I am confident that things will still thrive without me! Thanks for the journey; it has been a challenging ride along the way. I will keep my gmail email address so if you ever feel the need to contact me, please feel free.  
behrensbj@gmail.com.

*Barbara J. Behrens, PTA, MS*

*Soon to be Professor Emeritus!*

### PEEK INTO THE PTA LAB – SPRING 2020



### IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE PTA PROGRAM

#### **PTA Class of 2020:**

The Class of 2020 was able to complete the didactic portion of their spring semester before the physical shut down of the college. All inpatient clinical affiliations (hospitals and post-acute settings) cancelled spring affiliations, along with a handful of outpatient clinics. All learners in the program were given an option to “opt out” of spring 2020 clinical affiliations. Of 17 learners, we have eight currently in outpatient clinical sites. The goal of the PTA program is to graduate as many learners on time as we can and to minimize the graduation delay for all others. We will be working with our clinical sites throughout the summer to obtain “make-up” clinical affiliations for the Class of 2020. All PT and PTA programs will be doing the same, so the competition will be high!

#### **PTA Class of 2021:**

Letters of acceptance were sent to the incoming Class of 2021 just days before the college shut down its physical campus. The college has determined that all summer semesters will continue with remote or online instruction. Therefore, we will be unable to teach Therapeutic Measurement and Therapeutic Exercise in the summer, as planned. These two lab courses cannot be transitioned to an online format. To ensure that the Class of 2021 graduates on time, while completing all courses in a meaningful sequence, we have adjusted all semesters within the professional phase for this year only. Learners will take two lecture courses online this summer that were originally planned for the fall (Pathology & PTA Seminar). The two summer lab courses will be taught in the fall semester. To ensure that we can accommodate competency testing and make efficient use of the lab, PTA 211 (Biophysical Agents) will move into the spring semester. Lastly, PTA 237 (Professional Development), will be taught as an online course during the final summer semester, along with the final clinical affiliation.

## FROM PT (IN BRAZIL) TO PTA

### Camila Piroli, PTA, Class of 2019

Hello MCCC PTAs and SPTAs!

My name is Camila Piroli and I am an alumna of the 2019 MCCC PTA class. Before attending MCCC, I was a Physical Therapist (PT) in Brazil with a Masters Degree in Bioscience and Rehabilitation from the Instituto de Porto Alegre. When I moved to the United States in 2013, I was not able to practice Physical Therapy since the laws and regulations here are different than they are in my home country. I'm certain that I am not the only immigrant who needed to redefine her healthcare career after arriving in the United States. It's a difficult journey and one where you can't skip steps, especially when your goal is to treat patients. It is certainly a more high-risk environment than an office setting where you are working on spreadsheets instead of human beings. This risk factor, along with the difference in laws and responsibilities of Physical Therapists in the United States led me to pursue my PTA degree at MCCC.

Without a doubt, pursuing my PTA degree was the best decision ever! I learned so much in this program that supplemented my previous education and training that I felt completely confident to return to the clinical setting and treat patients. Don't get me wrong... Learning new concepts and relearning techniques in a second language was not easy. However, when I go to work everyday and see my patients improving, I know that I made the right choice!

Camila Piroli

## COVID-19: ALUMNI CLINICAL EXPERIENCES

### Anonymous

I am a recent graduate of the MCCC PTA program and I am currently employed in a skilled nursing facility in middlesex county. The facility I work for is made up of one floor subacute as well as two floors long term care. At the onset of the virus there were a lot of unknowns regarding policies and procedures like most skilled nursing facilities I assume. The facility began to make a quarantine unit in order to allow room for over flow from the hospital at the peak of infection due to our association with the hospital. At this point, all visitors were no longer allowed into the building and we began doing daily screens consisting of temperatures and a questionnaire.

Policies regarding PPE (surgical masks) changed daily due to the fear of eventually running out. At the start of the virus PPE was only to be worn by those working in the quarantine unit unless specified by precautions. That eventually changed and all staff were told to wear a mask at all times while in the facility. From a rehab perspective we began treating patients bedside and all patients were required to stay on their floor until further notice. Currently our census is extremely low so when our caseload is finished we are asked to help elsewhere to alleviate some stress from nursing. OT/OTA began working as aides, speech began feeding and PT/PTA began doing the daily screens. Although this is far from over I hope everyone is staying safe and getting enough rest!

## COVID-19: ALUMNI CLINICAL EXPERIENCES

### **Ewa Doliwa, PTA, Class of 2016**

Well, fortunately, I still have a job. I work in SNF in Hamilton. The COVID 19 pandemic brought so much stress and anxiety to my workplace. Initially, there was, at least. As we got more informed and trained, things got better. Fortunately, we have enough PPE to feel safe treating patients and work among other disciplines. Last week we got a couple of COVID-19 cases. As a result, some rehab and nursing personnel got sent home for quarantine or to be tested for the virus. Since then, our building does not accept new admissions. As a result, we expect to have fewer hours and possibly be forced to take unplanned PTO time. Since our LTC residents go in and out of the hospital for various reasons, we are constantly fearing exposure to the virus that the residents could have contracted during hospitalization. And that we could potentially pass the virus onto our families. As a rehab team, we stay "together" in this. We perform good hand hygiene; washing our hands vigorously with soap and water for at least 30 sec, rather than using alcohol gel as our skin is brittle already. We wear masks at all times and we educate the pt's and our families to practice too. We are in this together.

### **Norma Coles, PTA, Class of 2014**

During the past several weeks of Covid-19, my facility guide lines have changed mostly every day under the direction of the CDC, government and corporate entities. All SNF were closed to the public only essential personal were allowed in.

This first week emphasized on sanitation (which was always a priority) in our gym. Later in the week the gym was closed and we were to treat on the units and to use a new face masks with persons who were on O2 or with lung co-morbidities. (Gloves were in abundance and still are at the time of this writing)

By the end of the that week, masks were in shortage.

By the beginning of next week, they closed off all entrances except for one for employees. At this entrance, you filled out a form on a iPad asking if you left the country or visited any of the countries that had high cases of Covid-19 and if you had any fever above 100 degrees.

A worker was there to help with the process, and to take your temperature. Sadly, they only had "CVS" type brand and it would read consistently low.

By this time, you were given one mask to use for the day/shift.

As the virus spread and the guidelines CDC increased we were mandated to wear mask at all times in the building. That also included the empty gym that we did our notes.

The 6'foot distancing was mandatory in our gym and computers were set apart and set around the gym.

For me, I felt I was as safe as I could be, washed hands, used sanitizer, don't touch my face, I wiped down the computer before using it with a PPD wipe including the table and wore gloves (I have eczema and the residue from them is very irritating to my skin), my elbow got to learn new tricks with pushing buttons and doors. (Still can't figure out how to use both elbows to turn knobs yet...)

All equipment that was taken to patients rooms needed to be bagged and carried back to gym for a cleaning, including walkers.

Welcome signs; All new admissions have a "welcome signs" on their door.

I thought, 'oh how nice!' only to find out what that really means.

They are in quarantine for 14 days.

## PAGE FIVE

### PHYSICAL THERAPY NEWS

Physical Therapist Assistants will be able to treat patients with Tricare, beginning this month!

Read the article here to learn more: <https://www.webpt.com/blog/post/breaking-news-ptas-and-otas-officially-authorized-as-tricare-providers/>

### A NEW ACCE IS ON THE WAY!

A search committee was formed at the start of the spring semester to hire a new full-time faculty member in the Physical Therapist Assistant Program. This faculty member will also act as the Academic Coordinator of Clinical Education (ACCE). The search committee was able to conduct all interviews prior to the college's physical closing. The final candidates were interviewed by administration via Zoom and the college is very close to offering the ACCE position to the final candidate.

The new ACCE will be introduced in either the summer or fall alumni newsletter!

### PLEASE HELP, IF YOU CAN!

**Now, more than ever, our students are turning to us for help. This is where you can make a real difference.** We realize that many of our alumni are facing similar challenges, so we ask you to assist our efforts in any way you can.

For those who have the ability to do so, please support our students with a donation to our MCCC Student Emergency Fund by visiting <http://www.mccc.edu/mercermatters>, or texting **MercerMatters** to **41444**. Every dollar counts – no donation is too small. Truly, even \$1 dollar, will make an impact.

If you are unable to make a donation, kindly pass this message along to anyone who might be willing to help. A simple "share" on your social media can have a large impact on our ability to assist our students. Encourage others to "Support MCCC by making a fast, secure donation via text message! No donation is too small, and your support is greatly appreciated!"