

Addressing Social and Structural Determinants of Health through a Community of Learning Cases

Challenge – Social factors, including socioeconomic status, discrimination, and geography, are leading determinants of health and strongly influence client outcomes. These social determinants are further influenced by structural factors, including the educational, economic, and environmental policies that shape our everyday lives. Teaching physical therapy (PT) students about the social and structural determinants of health and related health disparities is complicated by the disjointed presentation of social and structural constructs throughout the PT curriculum. The result is an incomplete picture of the factors that influence a client's prognosis and the potential reinforcement of negative stereotypes. Students and faculty from the PT program have worked to enhance delivery of social and structural constructs through the development of a community of cases (i.e., Community Tree).

Approach – First, our workgroup (PT students and faculty) collected and analyzed existing PT learning cases and categorized content according to the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF), the PT Patient Management Model, and various population health frameworks. Second, we identified gaps in and opportunities for learning objectives tied to the social and structural determinants of health (scaffolded according to Bloom's taxonomy). Finally, we leveraged a conceptual framework proposed by Kim et.al. (2006) to craft a Community Tree – a group of individuals who live in a fictional community and whose health is influenced by diverse social and structural factors.

Outcomes – We present a novel series of comprehensive learning cases for PT educators to use in clinical management courses as a means of enhancing the integration of social and structural determinants of health. Students will have an opportunity to learn about each member of this community. Over the course of the curriculum, they will gain a deeper understanding of the multiple and complex factors that influence the health of this community. Included in this Community Tree will be a user guide that educators may use to disclose content, scaffold learning objectives, facilitate discussion, and inform assessment. The guide will additionally include evidence regarding the influence of social and structural factors on specific health conditions and related outcomes.

Next Steps – The Community Tree will be implemented during the Summer 2022 semester. Feedback from students and faculty regarding implementation of the learning cases, delivery of content, and discussion of social and structural factors will be used to assess effectiveness. We expect this Community Tree to aid in the training of PT students who are equipped to identify and address the complex health needs of increasingly diverse clinical populations.