

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Rick Wickstrom, PT, DPT, CPE, CME

Networking with members in the Occupational Health Special Interest Group is a great benefit of belonging that helps appreciate *what new opportunities exist, how to deliver cost-effective care, and why advocacy is needed* to promote health in our clients and practice. At CSM, I was prompted by my colleague, Drew Snyder, to identify the single greatest government accomplishment during my lifetime. For me, it was the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), whereas for him, it was Operation Warp Speed. Both are great examples of putting aside social and political differences to unite in a common purpose of health and productivity for society.

My thirst for **what new opportunities exist** explains my sense of happiness to return to participation in-person at the Combined Sections Meeting in San Antonio. I love to network with enthusiastic students, colleagues, and exhibitors to learn more about opportunities, challenges, tests, measures, interventions, and elements of program design that represent our common purpose as physical therapy professionals. The AOPT all-SIG meet and greet social event was a good opportunity to connect with all SIG leaders. Our OHSIG-branded OMNI Exertion Scale was a popular SWAG item at the AOPT booth. We plan to make batches of OMNI scales available to OHSIG members for student use in schools or therapist use in clinics. Lorena Payne and Dee Daley engaged us in our OHSIG sponsored educational program, *Return to Work—It Does Not Happen by Accident*.

How to deliver cost-effective care is reflected in our OHSIG focus on implementing direct-to-employer services that demonstrate value with workplace population health management. January 2022 marked the release of a new AOPT Independent Study Course 32.4, *Bridging the Gap Between the Workplace and Clinic*. This is the first component of our Occupational Health Advanced Practitioner (OHAP) certificate program. It details opportunities and best practices for physical therapy professionals within a new frontier of workplace *Total Worker Health*[®] programs, functional job analyses and employment examinations, and entry point care of injured workers with job participation barriers. We appreciate the outstanding monographs in this ISC by author teams led by Josh Prall, Moyo Tillery, and Jennifer Klose.

Stay tuned for the release of the second required ISC course for the certificate of OHAP this summer that is titled, *Advanced Therapy Programs in Occupational Health*. Katie McBee, Leslie Pickett, and Wayne McMasters are setting a new bar for best practice guidance by their author teams. This ISC will cover clinical practice guidelines for work rehabilitation to address prolonged episodes of care, elements of ergonomic programs in healthcare and industry, and functional capacity evaluation and impairment. We have an outstanding steering committee for our certificate initiative that includes Marc Campo (Research Committee Chair), David Hoyle, Jennifer Klose, Lisa Krefft, Sarah Martin, Leslie Pickett, Michelle Urban-Stewart, and Rick Wickstrom. We completed a AOPT member survey that is informing our design for the third

phase of our certificate process with a focus on program design and marketing.

Why advocacy is needed is reflected in regulatory or policy barriers that continue to limit a physical therapists ability to promote individual participation in physical activities across all practice settings. We must boldly assert to all stakeholders that a physical therapist is a **direct access primary health practitioner** who serves individuals across the lifespan at the entry point of care. The OHSIG has challenged our members to add their state to the growing list of states where physical therapists are authorized to perform Department of Transportation Physical Examinations of commercial drivers. My experience with having to clarify my scope of practice to become a DOT Certified Medical Examiner in OH and KY motivated me to draft a House of Delegates motion to better clarify the physical therapist's role in participation physical examinations to determine the presence or absence of physical impairments and to certify fitness for activity participation, functional limitations, and need for accommodations in work, school, sports, and other activities of daily living. I found it concerning that physical therapists who perform objective performance-based physical exams faced barriers to conducting participation exams, compared to health practitioners who prescribe medications. We need to point to positive examples such as the inclusion physical therapists to perform exams such as a DOT physical exam that have a public safety purpose in our advocacy to get physical therapists include on the list of practitioners who are authorized to perform other participation exams such as sports pre-participation evaluation required by youth or high school athletic associations.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to other leaders. Past-president Lorena Payne just completed a 3-year term as Practice Chair and will continue to assist with implementation of the OHSIG Work Rehab CPG published in August 2021. Caroline Furtak completed her second term as Membership Chair and will continue in another role on the AOPT Membership Committee. Michelle Despres completed a 3-year term on our Nominating Committee and will continue to assist as a member of the Work Rehab CPG Committee with Lorena Payne, Dee Daley (first author), and Lori Deal. Cory Blickenstaff completed a 3-year term as Communications Committee Chair and has accepted a new role as our Practice Committee Chair to drive our OHSIG State Resource Liaison initiative. The state of the union is bright for OHSIG. I value the amazing works and encouragement of my leadership sidekick, Steve Allison (Vice President and Education Chair). We are thankful for all the support from Janet Konecne (AOPT Director) and entire AOPT staff for our many initiatives. We greatly benefited from the outstanding leadership of AOPT's outgoing President, Joe Donnelly, who was tenacious in updating AOPT governance and the strategic plan, while being very inclusive and encouraging of SIG leaders.