

Considering a Future in Sports Physical Therapy **Teresa L. Schuemann PT, DPT, SCS, ATC, CSCS**

Are you a physical therapy student considering a future in sports physical therapy? Below are tips for becoming involved in the specialty area of sports physical therapy.

1. Obtain a copy of the Sports Physical Therapy Description of Specialty Practice (DSP), which your school likely owns. If not, you may want to suggest that your librarian obtain the entire set of specialty practice descriptions from the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA). They can be purchased from the Resource Center at APTA or on the website (www.apta.org). These documents describe each specialty area in detail - one of which is Sports Physical Therapy (Sports PT). The Sports Physical Therapy Description of Specialty Practice will define what you would do if you pursue a career in Sports PT. You also are encouraged to compare the description to that of another specialty area, orthopedic physical therapy, because this is often an area of confusion. For example, there are orthopedic PTs who work with some athletes with sports injuries. A sports PT, on the other hand, works with both athletes and orthopedic patients. The reality is that only a position with a university in the athletics department, or one with a professional athletic organization, is likely to carry a 100% sports medicine case load. The average sports case load of a sports PT hovers around 40% in most outpatient or hospital-based clinics.

2. Join the APTA if you have not already done so and then the Sports Physical Therapy Section (SPTS). The SPTS will provide you with educational opportunities, networking and mentoring within the sports physical therapy world. As a member of the SPTS, you will receive both the Journal of Orthopedic and Sports Physical Therapy (JOSPT) and the North American Journal of Sports PT (NAJSPT), a sports physical therapy journal sponsored by the SPTS and its Canadian counterpart, Sports Physiotherapy Canada. In January 2009, SPTS members will receive as a benefit of membership a new journal, Sports Health: A Multidisciplinary Approach. This publication is written in collaboration with the American Orthopedic Society for Sports Medicine (AOSSM), the American Medical Society for Sports Medicine (AMSSM), the Sports Physical Therapy Section (SPTS) of the APTA, and the National Athletic Trainers Association (NATA).

3. Obtain at least one clinical internship in a facility that provides sports medicine services and attempt to have a Clinical Instructor that is a board certified sports PT specialist (SCS). You can locate these clinicians by searching the APTA website for all the SCS PTs in your preferred geographic locations. You will have more choices if you are able to

indicate a broad variety of locations. Search this listing of SCS clinicians for facilities with which your school currently has an affiliation agreement. If there are no matches, e-mail a selection of the SCS clinicals to see if you might establish a clinical affiliation with them in accordance with policies dictated by your school's program. Another tip would be to review the listing of credentialed sports physical therapy residency programs in the nation. These programs will have sports medicine services and clients. They are the leaders in educating the next generation of SCS clinicians. These credentialed programs are listed on the SPTS website at www.spts.org.

4. Some continuing education opportunities include the Emergency Response Course for the Physical Therapy, covering principles for emergency management of the injured athlete (information is available at www.spts.org), and the National Strength and Conditioning Association's Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist (CSCS) program (www.nasca-cc.org). These courses serve as the basis of two of the major domains of a sports PT, with reference to acute management of sports injury and rehabilitation of the athlete.

5. Realize that the purpose of entry-level physical therapy education is to make you a generalist, not a specialty clinician. Specialties, such as sports, orthopedics, or neurology, may be pursued after graduation. The reality is that a first job will very unlikely be one working primarily with athletes. One "fast track" to becoming a specialist in sports PT is to look into a residency program. These programs are designed to expose the resident to didactic, practical and mentored experiences under the framework of the sports PT DSP. They typically last one year and the outcome is that the resident receives experience which facilitates the attainment of the SCS. The applicant still needs to take the specialty certification examination but the residency programs appear to be very successful in the preparation phase. The APTA (www.apta.org) website has much more information about residency programs.