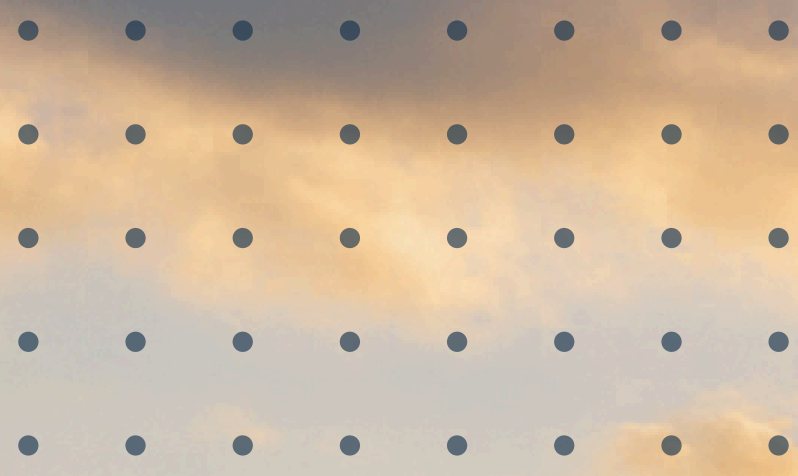




APTA
Acute Care™



BRIDGE THE GAP 2026

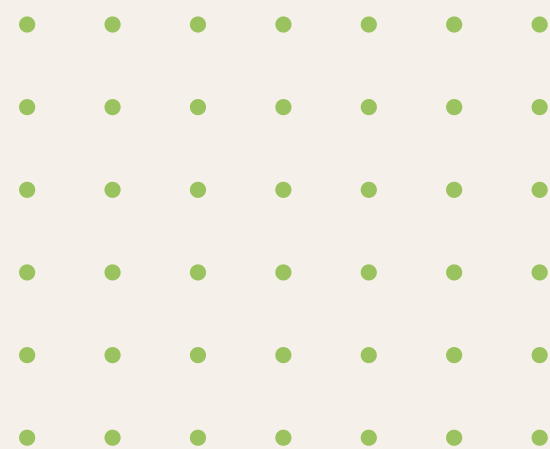
INNOVATION IN ACTION:
ELEVATING ACUTE CARE PRACTICE



May 1-3, 2026 | Chicago, IL

Table of Contents

Registration Information.....	3
Schedule at a Glance.....	4
Course Descriptions.....	7
General Information.....	14



Registration Information

Welcome to the Bridge The Gap Conference: Innovation in Action: Elevating Acute Care Practice!

Step into the future of acute care at the Bridge The Gap Conference—a dynamic, in-person learning experience designed for clinicians ready to innovate, lead, and elevate practice. Join acute care professionals from across the country for two days of practical insights, inspiring ideas, and meaningful connections in the heart of Chicago.

Why Attend?

- Discover cutting-edge innovations shaping acute care practice
- Learn actionable strategies you can implement immediately
- Customize your experience with choose-your-own concurrent sessions
- Connect with peers and leaders who are redefining the profession
- Receive up to 11 CEU's! (**Please note:** We do NOT apply for state-specific CEU approval for this event, however your state licensure may allow credits for this education activity. We do provide a certificate of attendance. You will need to contact the agency or organization in your state, which handles your professional licensure, in order to determine whether credit is available for this event, and without applications for approval.)

APTA Acute Care Members:

- Be sure to log in to your APTA Acute Care account to receive the discounted member rate of \$229!

Conference Pricing

APTA Acute Care Member - PT/PTA:	\$229
Non-Member:	\$329
Student Member:	\$50
Student Non-Member:	\$75

Schedule at a Glance

FRIDAY, MAY 1, 2026

1:00 PM - 4:00 PM
2:15 PM - 3:00 PM
3:00 PM - 3:45 PM
4:00 PM - 4:30 PM
4:30 PM - 6:00 PM
6:00 PM - 7:30 PM

Registration/Check In
Shirley Ryan AbilityLab Tours Group A
Shirley Ryan AbilityLab Tours Group B
Welcome and Introductions
Keynote
Posters Reception w/Wine & Cheese

SATURDAY, MAY 2, 2026

7:30 AM - 8:00 AM
8:00 AM - 9:00 AM

9:00 AM - 9:30 AM

9:30 AM - 9:45 AM
9:45 AM - 12:00 PM

Breakfast

Concurrent 1



Emergency in Every Zip Code: PT Across Different ED Settings



Scaling Clinical Education: Implementing a Collaborative 3:1 Model in Acute Care Physical Therapy

Concurrent 2



Operationalizing: Early Mobility: Implementing the ELK Progressive Warmup Sequence



Leveraging Functional Data to Improve Outcomes for Older Adults

Break

9:45 AM - 12:00 PM

Teaching Through the Lens of Acute Care Competencies: The CI's Guide to Student Success – Part 1 and 2

OR

9:45 AM - 10:45 AM

Bridging the Gap: Changing the Culture of Mobility in Critical Care

10:45 AM - 11:00 AM

Break

11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Clarity In, Clarity Out: Communication and Outcomes

Schedule at a Glance

SATURDAY, MAY 2, 2026 (cont.)

12:00 PM - 1:30 PM

Networking/Table Discussions with Lunch

1:30 PM - 2:30 PM

Concurrent 3



IMPACTING Value: Development, Testing, and Department-Wide Implementation of a Novel Acute Care Therapy Prioritization Tool



Advancing Adaptive Expertise in Acute Care Physical Therapy: Integrating the Master Adaptive Learner Framework

2:30 PM - 2:45 PM

Break

2:45 PM - 3:45 PM

Concurrent 4



Functional Neurologic Disorder in Acute Care: From Recognition to Response with Tools, Techniques, and Treatment Strategies



Empowering Clinicians in a Learning Health System for Acute Care Practice

SUNDAY, MAY 3, 2026

7:30 AM - 8:00 AM

Breakfast

8:00 AM - 9:00 AM

Concurrent 1



Safeguarding the Heart: Physical Therapy Approaches to Cardiotoxicity in Cancer Survivors



Use of Simulated Experiences to Increase Confidence in Patients, Families, and New Hire Physical/Occupational Therapy Staff in the Pediatric Acute Care Setting

9:00 AM - 9:15 AM

Break





Schedule at a Glance

SUNDAY, MAY 3, 2026 (cont.)

9:15 AM - 11:30 AM

9:15 AM - 11:30 AM Hospital to Home: Enhancing Geriatric Post-Acute Care Transitions

OR

9:15 AM - 10:15 AM	From ICU to Independence: Implementing a Multidisciplinary Post-Intensive Care Syndrome (PICS) Clinic
10:15 AM - 10:30 AM	Break
10:30 AM - 11:00 AM	Exploring the Educational Impact of an Interprofessional ECG escape room activity on OT, PA, and PT Students
11:00 AM - 11:30 AM	Academic Strategies in Closing the Acute Care Readiness Gap

11:30 AM - 11:45 AM

Break

11:45 AM - 12:45 AM

Concurrent 2



Homeward Bound: Interdisciplinary Strategies to Increase Discharge to Home After Hip Fracture Repair



Bridging Confidence and Competence: Simulation-Based Learning in Acute Care Physical Therapy Education

12:45 AM - 1:00 PM

Wrap Up



Course Descriptions

Keynote - Practicing at the Top of your license: Strengthening Acute Care Practice Through Competency, Collaboration, and Specialization | Traci Norris, PT, DPT, GCS, Jennifer Ryan, PT, DPT, MS, CCS

May 1 | 4:30 PM - 6:00 PM

Acute care physical therapists and physical therapist assistants face unique pressures—rapid decision-making, medically complex patients, and the need to demonstrate value in high-acuity settings. This keynote highlights the innovations and practice models that are helping clinicians meet these demands while elevating patient outcomes. We will explore current challenges in acute care delivery, opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration, and the emerging role of technology, evidence-based frameworks, and educational models. The session will also provide a clear, accessible overview of the Acute Care Physical Therapy Specialization: what it means for the profession, how to prepare, and how specialization can strengthen both individual practice and the broader acute care community. Participants will leave with actionable insights and renewed confidence in the future of acute care physical therapy.

Emergency in Every Zip Code: PT Across Different ED Settings | Adrienne Javes, PT, DPT, Sarah Nechvatal, PT, DPT, Shelly Taylor-Hampton, PT, DPT

May 2 | 8:00 AM - 9:00 AM

The emergency department is an emerging and evolving area of PT practice. This session will focus on the differences, barriers and benefits of PT practice across different trauma level emergency departments including a critical access hospital. 3 presenters will share their experience working in different ED settings: an urban acute care hospital, a suburban acute care hospital, and a rural critical access hospital. Audience members will be able to compare and contrast the unique models of care, schedules and role of PT in each setting listening to clinical experience and case examples.

Scaling Clinical Education: Implementing a Collaborative 3:1 Model in Acute Care Physical Therapy | Kristin Sicotte, PT, DPT, Adam Bridwell, PT, DPT

May 2 | 8:00 AM - 9:00 AM

As acute care settings face increasing demands for clinical education capacity, innovative models are essential to bridge the gap between academic preparation and clinical practice. This session explores the implementation of a collaborative 3:1 clinical education model, where one skilled clinical instructor supervises three physical therapy learners simultaneously. Drawing from extensive, real-world experience in a large teaching hospital, this presentation will provide a framework for evaluating readiness, structuring the model, and training clinical instructors. Attendees will gain actionable strategies to enhance clinical education capacity while maintaining high-quality learning experiences.

Operationalizing: Early Mobility: Implementing the ELK Progressive

Warmup Sequence | Emily Kavanaugh, PT, DPT, MBA (CCS)

May 2 | 9:00 AM - 9:30 AM

This session presents a data-driven and process-oriented approach to defining, operationalizing, and optimizing early mobility post-sternotomy with the ELK Progressive Warmup Sequence. This 7-year retrospective analysis of over 1,600 post-sternotomy cases compares patient outcomes and qualitative insights of the ELK process vs. usual care. Participants will examine the five hypotheses and quantitative findings demonstrating that structured warmup sequencing on POD1 significantly enhances gait distance, independence, reduces the number of skilled PT sessions required, and improves home discharge rates compared with usual care.

Leveraging Functional Data to Improve Outcomes for Older Adults | Erin Thomas, PT, DPT, Jim Smith, PT, DPT, Martin Minrovic, Beth Hunt, PT, DPT

May 2 | 9:00 AM - 9:30 AM

A recent Journal of Hospital Medicine systematic review (Thomas et al., 2025) established that impairments in mobility and physical function are among the most consistent predictors of 30-day readmission across diverse patient populations. Yet, this information is rarely structured or integrated into the electronic health record (EHR) in ways that inform clinical care. This session explores strategies for integrating data in functioning into hospital decision-making systems to strengthen risk identification, guide rehabilitation, and function as a biomarker among hospitalized older adults. Participants will learn strategies for embedding standardized measures into EHR workflows, leveraging interoperability and predictive analytics to improve care transitions. Real-world examples and pilot programs will illustrate how hospitals can use functional data to guide rehabilitation planning, reduce readmissions, and enhance patient-centered outcomes. By bridging the gap between evidence and technology, this session aims to empower clinicians and administrators to make data-driven decisions that optimize recovery and quality of life for older adults.

Teaching Through the Lens of Acute Care Competencies: The CI's Guide to Student Success – Part 1 and 2 | Eric Sawyer, PT, DPT, Rebecca Keefer, PT, DPT, CCS

May 2 | 9:45 AM - 12:00 PM

The Core Competencies for Entry Level Practice in Acute Care Physical Therapy were published in 2015 and describe 5 domains of clinical practice. However, students often arrive in acute care with limited awareness of the full role of a physical therapist, focusing primarily on direct patient care. The Competencies can be used by Clinical Instructors (CIs) to evaluate DPT student performance, recognize areas for growth, and promote development in specific domains. Initial data show limited familiarity with the Competencies among acute care CIs, and few use them for clinical teaching. This 2 Part session will review the domains and provide a framework to augment clinical teaching, including integrating domains into formative and summative evaluations. Student performance scenarios will be followed by brainstorming to apply the framework to clinical instruction, and attendees will be encouraged to share “real” student examples to enrich discussion.

Bridging the Gap: Changing the Culture of Mobility in Critical Care | **Jamie Dyson, PT, DPT, Constanza Aranda, PT, DPT, MSPH**

May 2 | 9:45 AM - 10:45 AM

Despite a growing body of evidence supporting early mobility in the intensive care unit (ICU), implementation across clinical settings remains inconsistent. This session presents a pragmatic framework for transforming the ICU mobility culture through interprofessional collaboration, leadership engagement, and structured implementation strategies. Participants will explore barriers such as sedation practices, staffing models, and misaligned priorities, while identifying facilitators that promote shared ownership of mobility. Through discussion, interactive polling, and applied case analysis, attendees will learn to operationalize evidence-based mobility pathways, implement tiered mobility algorithms, and track functional outcomes to demonstrate value.

Clarity In, Clarity Out: Communication and Outcomes | **Kimberly Lemmons, PT, DPT, NCS, CSRS, Marissa Brooks, PT, MPT**

May 2 | 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

PTs have a pivotal role in acute care by improving patient outcomes and key hospital metrics such as length of stay and readmission rates. As evidence grows on the influence of PT-driven post-acute discharge recommendations, a central challenge remains: effectively communicating prognostic reasoning and post-acute needs. Because discharge planning begins at hospital entry and involves many factors, gaps can occur when PT recommendations are not reflected in the final plan: impacting safety, efficiency, and continuity of care. This session equips attendees to analyze functional activity deficits using standardized outcome measures, integrate communication strategies to strengthen discharge recommendations, and identify policy, legislative, and community resources essential to post-acute planning. Acute care case studies across emergency/observation, ICU, and medical-surgical units will examine interprofessional dynamics, patient autonomy, and documentation ambiguity while identifying strategies to improve communication and alignment among care team members.

IMPACTING Value: Development, Testing, and Department-Wide Implementation of a Novel Acute Care Therapy Prioritization Tool | **Andrew Cable, PT, DPT, Kelly Kehoe, PT, Kayla Butler, PT, DPT, NCS, Julia Giovanni, PT, DPT, MPH**

May 2 | 1:30 PM - 2:30 PM

Development, Testing, and Department-Wide Implementation of a Novel Acute Care Therapy Prioritization Tool Acute therapists are a highly constrained, critical resource; inconsistent prioritization undermines value-based care efforts. This session unveils the development, testing, and department-wide implementation of the IMPACT tool standardized scoring system designed to prioritize care based on the therapist's anticipated impact on a patient's function, independence, and discharge setting. We will detail the three-phase project (development, two PDSA cycles, and implementation) across a major academic medical center. Initial data demonstrates a strong correlation between high IMPACT scores and increased total therapy minutes, successfully aligning resource allocation with high-value care. This is essential for clinicians and leaders seeking evidence-informed consistency and successful practice change.

Advancing Adaptive Expertise in Acute Care Physical Therapy: Integrating the Master Adaptive Learner Framework | Kristina Latva, DPT, EdD, Pam Durr, PT, DPT

May 2 | 1:30 PM - 2:30 PM

Preparing physical therapy students for acute care practice requires more than content mastery - it demands the development of adaptive expertise and clinical reasoning. The Master Adaptive Learner Framework (MAL), originally from medical education, provides a structured model to promote reflection, self-directed learning, and professional adaptability. This session presents outcomes from implementing MAL into a second-year cardiopulmonary acute care curriculum aligned with American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) Cardiovascular and Pulmonary and Acute Core Competencies. Participants will examine pre-post survey data, MAL reflection themes, and clinical performance outcomes measured using the Clinical Performance Instrument (CPI).

Functional Neurologic Disorder in Acute Care: From Recognition to Response with Tools, Techniques, and Treatment Strategies | Kimberly Lemmons, PT, DPT, NCS, CSRS, Jill Nappi-Kaehler, PT, DPT, NCS DHSc

May 2 | 2:45 PM - 3:45 PM

Rehabilitation professionals in acute care frequently encounter complex presentations that challenge traditional diagnostic frameworks. Physical therapists, as movement experts, must differentiate pathological movement patterns, even when neurologic origins are unclear, to guide timely, effective care. This session will enable attendees to differentiate major FND subtypes and recognize key clinical characteristics relevant to acute care decision-making. Participants will learn evidence-based assessment techniques to assist with FND within the differential diagnosis and explore practical, acute care-specific tools for early intervention. Through interactive discussion and case-based application, participants will leave with actionable strategies to optimize acute care management and improve outcomes for patients presenting with FND.

Empowering Clinicians in a Learning Health System for Acute Care Practice Grant Bitzer, PT, DPT, EdD, Ashley Poole, PT, DPT, Joshua Johnson, DPT, PhD, Kimberly Hreha, EdD, OTR/L

May 2 | 2:45 PM - 3:45 PM

A Learning Health System (LHS) is a framework in which data, practice, and culture are aligned to continuously generate, apply, and refine knowledge to improve patient outcomes. In this session, we will explore what it means to operationalize an LHS within an academic medical center. We will introduce the core principles and structures of an LHS, illustrate how our organization has developed an embedded system of continuous learning, and share concrete examples of how clinicians, educators, and operational leaders collaborate to generate and apply new knowledge. The session will conclude with an interactive activity in which participants submit a clinical question or improvement idea. Using our established processes as a model, we will demonstrate how an LHS can evaluate, support, and empower clinicians to transform questions into actionable learning projects.

Safeguarding the Heart: Physical Therapy Approaches to Cardiotoxicity in Cancer Survivors | Keriann Fanelli, PT, DPT, Galen Schram, PT, DPT

May 3 | 8:00 AM - 9:00 AM

In this session learners will review the pathophysiology of cardiotoxicity associated with chemotherapy and radiation therapy. Speakers will review risk factors for developing cardiotoxicity including relevant cancer diagnoses and cardiotoxic agents, including anthracyclines, HER2 inhibitors, and immune checkpoint inhibitors, as well as the mechanisms by which they impair cardiac function. The session will outline the typical timeline and progression of symptoms, from subclinical changes in ejection fraction to overt heart failure and exercise intolerance. Learners will be provided with screening and assessment tools that can be applied in the clinical setting including relevant vital sign trends, lab and imaging findings, and physical performance measures. Speakers will review treatment interventions and goal-setting for patients admitted to both intensive care and step-down units, emphasizing clinical judgment to progress and regress interventions.

Use of Simulated Experiences to Increase Confidence in Patients, Families, and New Hire Physical/Occupational Therapy Staff in the Pediatric Acute Care Setting | Jenna Gondelman, PT, DPT, PCS, Bethany O'Toole, DPT, PT

May 3 | 8:00 AM - 9:00 AM

The session will provide an introduction to the use of simulation scenarios for staff training and pre-operative patient preparation. The Physical Therapy (PT) department at Boston Children's Hospital (BCH) has embraced the use of simulation within the clinical setting to enhance clinical skills across a wide variety of clinical platforms. Through simulation, clinicians report increased confidence in clinical skills and improved competence in management of medically complex patients. Pre-operative simulations at BCH are currently used to provide education for patients and families prior to posterior spinal fusions. Patients report feeling more prepared for their surgery following preop simulation. Given that pre-operative education has the potential to improve patient and family confidence, decrease hospital length of stay, and limit readmissions, there are many opportunities for expansion and cost saving in the future.

Hospital to Home: Enhancing Geriatric Post-Acute Care Transitions | Kaci DeWitt-Rickards, PT, DPT, Kara La Grande

May 3 | 9:15 AM - 11:30 AM

This course is tailored for rehabilitation therapists, case managers, and other healthcare professionals focused on the geriatric population. It examines the critical roles that a patient's prior living situation, functional status, insurance coverage, and other resources play in determining the most appropriate post-acute care disposition following an acute change in function. Emphasizing a patient-centered approach, the curriculum explores how therapists can effectively evaluate a patient's environment and available resources, integrating that insight with current regulatory environment when making recommendations for post-acute care.

From ICU to Independence: Implementing a Multidisciplinary Post-Intensive Care Syndrome (PICS) Clinic | Jennifer Anderson, PT DPT, CCS, Nicole Neveau, PT, DPT, NCS, FACHE, Natalie Stevens, MOT, OTR/L

May 3 | 9:15 AM - 10:15 AM

Survival from critical illness is no longer the finish line - it is the beginning of a complex recovery journey. Many ICU survivors experience ongoing physical, cognitive, and emotional impairments collectively known as Post-Intensive Care Syndrome (PICS). This session describes the development and implementation of a multidisciplinary PICS Clinic designed to bridge post-ICU care gaps and restore function, independence, and quality of life. Participants will explore how physical and occupational therapists collaborate with nursing and physician partners to perform targeted assessments such as the 6-Minute Walk Test, MoCA, grip strength, and ADL measures' and provide real-time interventions including DME recommendations, oxygen titration, and return-to-work or driving readiness. An interactive case presentation will guide participants through real-time problem-solving using an interdisciplinary approach to address barriers faced by ICU survivors.

Exploring the Educational Impact of an Interprofessional ECG escape room activity on OT, PA, and PT Students | Leslie Smith, PT, DPT

May 3 | 10:30 AM - 11:00 AM

Interprofessional education (IPE) is foundational in preparing healthcare graduates for collaborative acute care practice. This session will present an innovative model: an escape room-based educational intervention, piloted with occupational therapy (OT), physician assistant (PA), and physical therapy (PT) students, centered on ECG interpretation and acute care concepts. The ECG escape room challenged mixed teams of OT, PA, and PT students to solve time-sensitive, case-based puzzles, simulating common acute care scenarios requiring problem-solving, interprofessional communication, and basic ECG rhythm recognition. Findings demonstrate the escape room's feasibility and highlight improvements in perceived teamwork, interprofessional understanding, and clinical confidence among participants. This session aims to equip educators, clinicians, and administrators with an actionable model and data-driven guidance for implementing active, collaborative learning in acute care education.

Academic Strategies in Closing the Acute Care Readiness Gap | Archana Vatwani, PT, DPT, EdD, MBA

May 3 | 11:00 AM - 11:30 AM

Graduating DPTs must be ready for acute care across five interdependent domains' clinical decision-making, communication, safety, patient management, and discharge planning. Yet the literature indicates that inpatient- and ICU-specific readiness gaps persist, intensified by limited placement capacity and inconsistent clinical instructor availability. This 30-minute session presents a cohesive academic approach that aligns curriculum and assessment with the acute care competency framework, weaves early, repeated simulation-based learning and hospital-unit exposure throughout the curriculum and front-loads high-yield inpatient skills via targeted interprofessional simulation. The session also shares concise strategies and outcomes from acute-care curricula that have strengthened student safety, confidence, communication, and clinical decision-making while helping ease pressure on full-time inpatient placements.

Homeward Bound: Interdisciplinary Strategies to Increase Discharge to Home After Hip Fracture Repair | Nancy Ferreira, PT, DPT, Andrew Slusser, Honeylou Lim

May 3 | 11:45 AM - 12:45 PM

Discharge to home from the acute care setting is a key quality metric of CMS and third-party payors, yet nationally only 18% of patients hospitalized for femoral neck fracture are discharged home or with home health services. Despite most patients being admitted from home and qualitative evidence indicating that patients perceive home as a safe and supportive environment for recovery, discharge rates remain low. Evidence shows that early mobilization, twice-daily therapy, and coordinated interdisciplinary care improve outcomes and increase home discharge likelihood. This session will outline our structured interdisciplinary care model, which achieved a 48% home discharge rate post-hip fracture repair. We will detail physical therapy protocols emphasizing early mobilization, staffing models for high-acuity rehab, communication workflows, and strategies to engage patients and caregivers to support home discharge.

Bridging Confidence and Competence: Simulation-Based Learning in Acute Care Physical Therapy Education | Kate Bennett, DPT, Stacy Stolzman, PhD, MPT

May 3 | 11:45 AM - 12:45 PM

How do physical therapy educators develop excitement about acute care practice in future physical therapists? This session explores the integration of high-fidelity simulation into entry-level physical therapy education to enhance acute care competencies. Simulation-based learning (SBL) is an increasingly vital pedagogical tool in physical therapy education, particularly for preparing students for the complexities of acute care practice. In addition, SBL has emerged not only as a tool for skill development but also as a catalyst for generating enthusiasm and confidence in this challenging practice setting.

General Information

Conference Location:

Department of Physical Therapy & Human Movement Sciences
Feinberg School of Medicine
Northwestern University
645 N. Michigan Ave.* , Room 800
Chicago, IL 60611

*Building is located on the corner of Michigan Ave. & Erie St., please enter on Erie St. adjacent to TGI Friday's restaurant.

Airports in Chicago:

O'Hare International Airport
Midway International Airport

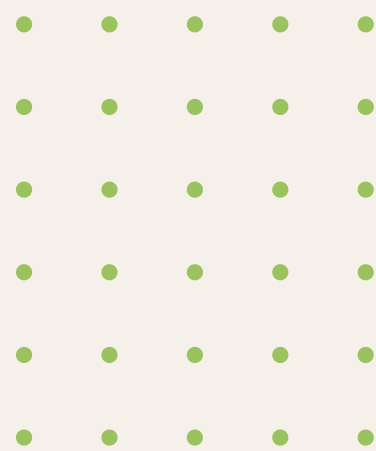
Hotel:

Warwick Allerton Hotel Chicago
701 N Michigan Avenue - 60611 Chicago, Illinois
+1 312-440-1500

Book your room here!

Transportation Options:

Lyft
Uber
Taxi



Parking:

See map of parking garages on the Northwestern University Chicago campus – Please prioritize parking in the Erie Street garage.