Get Involved, Grow & Advocate for Physical Therapy

If you have heard about “PT Fam” and are skeptical if it is a thing, I am here to tell you it is. If you are questioning if the APTA is actually doing anything for you, I am here to tell you they are. If you are hesitant to think you could talk to member of Congress or their staff about physical therapy, I am telling you can. I either learned or was reinforced in all this when I was at the 2019 Federal Advocacy Forum (FAF) in Washington, DC. Let me further explain what I mean by all this.

PT Fam is Real

You can’t walk into a room full of passionate and intelligent people committed to the profession of physical therapy and not feel connected in some way. When you strike up a conversation with anyone, you speak a common language and you are working towards a common goal. It automatically connects you. I’m not saying that every single person you meet you are going home as a forever best friend with that you will text every day, but here is what I am saying...

One of the most energetic, connected conversations I had in D.C. was with a student who I had met only 2 minutes prior for the first time. We found out we had similar interests in practice settings and were totally on the same page as to why! We exchanged twitter handles soon after.

On Sunday, I got on a plane with students from MN that I had never met before. On Tuesday, I got on a plane with those same people, but now as friends who I am excited to see again at upcoming events and just to get together!

I unexpectedly had lunch with a man from a different state who happened to be connected with the clinic in Minnesota where I had my first clinical. I got his business card and he told me to reach out if I needed help with anything.

These experiences were happening all over the place in just 2.5 days. I am so grateful to have experienced the physical therapy community at FAF! Open yourself up to getting to know our professional community. You’ll find out about the #PTFam.

The APTA is Doing Work

At the first evening of the forum a town hall took place where we were briefed on the current situation of work being done for physical therapy. I was taken back by all the work being done for our profession that is not visible in the every day of the classroom or clinic. People are on the ground keeping up with legislation and any changes thereof and advocating for us in the process. The APTA is making sure we are not forgotten in the legislation and regulation that plays a part in our practice! Every two years, the APTA puts together Public Policy Priorities that target the issues that impact our profession and our patients. These 2.5 days at the forum gave us the opportunity to show up and speak up on some of these issues. I was just recently told by a physical therapist back home that they thought people and leaders needed to know more about...
physical therapy because “no one knows what we do” he said. Thankfully, I could say that that is what is trying to be done right now! Educating our government and society on what physical therapy is about is part of the work that is happening. I was able to not only witness it but be actively involved in this education and advocacy at FAF. As members, we are the APTA. So if we want to see movement in our profession we need to be willing to support our association. I am grateful to have witnessed the impact of APTA membership and PT PAC support.

You and Me Can Speak To Our Members of Congress

At the Federal Advocacy Forum they prepare you for what you will be talking about with the Representatives, Senators, or their staff. We were introduced to the specific issues before we left for D.C. and while we are at the forum, we were presented the topics. They also allot time to practice with our group from Minnesota. I was able to work out the muddiness of what I wanted to say to help me get to my point that I wanted to share with my representative. You will be prepared and have people there to back you up. Beyond the preparation, we have the physical therapy education. We are immersed day in and day out on what physical therapy is and what we are capable of. We are experts in the field and therefore are capable at sharing our experience and knowledge with people who have not had our education. It was an empowering experience to talk with my representative about the future of physical therapy and therefore the future of my work.

One of the issues we brought to the capitol was adding physical therapists to the National Health Service Corps (NHSC). This is a student loan repayment program that works for practicing in specific areas that have a shortage of health professionals. There are over 7,026 health professional shortage areas nationwide. Right now, there are no physical rehab providers in the NHSC. Adding physical therapists would fill areas of the country that need preventative, rehabilitation, and pain management services that physical therapy can provide. As a nonpharmacological treatment for pain, we know that physical therapy is a strong player in fighting the current opioid crisis. With more than 11.4 million underserved people served through the NHSC, physical therapy needs to be a part of that service as well. There is no budget change. We are not asking for more money. We are asking to be eligible for the application process of the NHSC as we know we bring necessary skills to the areas in need of rehab, prevention, and pain management. (You can be watching and acting on the emails you receive on this specific issue!)

Coming back from the Federal Advocacy Forum only made me more grateful to be a part of the physical therapy profession. I am so grateful to have experiences like this that reaffirm my decision to join this profession. I hope this feeling can be experienced by everyone! I encourage anyone to step in and get involved in some way to grow in the profession and advocate for what we do. I have learned that we are a part of an incredible community of professionals, supported by a strong professional association, and capable of advocating for the good of our work and our patients.
Elizabeth Hermodson-Olsen
SPT, St. Catherine University, Class of 2020

*For reference:

**PAC:** [http://www.ptpac.org/home.aspx](http://www.ptpac.org/home.aspx) “The Physical Therapy Political Action Committee (PT-PAC) is the sole fundraising organization that provides access to and influence on legislators to champion physical therapy legislative interests at the federal level.”

“APTA serves as the voice for its members in Washington, DC. Through lobbying, grassroots, and regulatory advocacy, APTA aims to drive federal policy on the issues that impact physical therapists, physical therapist assistants, physical therapy students, and the patients and clients they serve. APTA establishes its public policy priorities every 2 years in conjunction with each new session of Congress.”