

FALL 2022

# EMORY Physical Therapy

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

New Emory DPT  
Director George Fulk

## *A Perfect Fit*

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

## My Vision and Values as Emory Division of PT's New Leader

What a huge honor it is for me to be the new director of the Emory Division of Physical Therapy. A year ago, I was happily serving in the same position at the Upstate Medical University in Syracuse, NY and I had no plans to go anywhere else. But when a world-renowned institution like Emory calls, it's difficult to ignore.

It didn't hurt that the three people whom I did know from the Emory DPT faculty prior to starting here June 1 — Edee Field-Fote, Marie Johanson and Steve Wolf — are some of the most well-known, respected educators and researchers in our field. And to top it off, they're wonderful people, too — the kind of people I enjoy being with in a social setting as well as in a classroom or conference room.

So, as the interview process continued and I had the opportunity to meet so many other Emory DPT faculty members, that cinched it for me. I was so impressed not only by their knowledge, accomplishments and innovative spirit, but also their dedication to the profession and most of all, their support for our diverse student body. It is such a great privilege to be chosen to lead such an impressive group of people who long before I arrived, have positioned the division as one of the premier physical therapy programs in the country.

Coming to a new organization, one of the most frequently asked questions that I've faced these past several months is: How would you describe your leadership style? While I hope the cover story in this magazine gives you a much better idea of who I am, the words that come to mind are visionary, intentional, inclusive and transparent.

As a researcher, I've always valued taking the time to make the best-informed decision even if it takes more time to get it right. To make the best decision, I value being a careful listener and ensuring that I've given all parties — whether they are faculty members, students or staff — a chance to provide input on the issue at hand.

In my experience, people will buy into a decision — even if it is one they disagree with — as long as they can share their viewpoints and know that they are valued and considered. Ownership skyrockets in an inclusive environment.

Leaders are also better and effective when they are transparent and there are open channels of communication across the entire organization. As your new director, I will do my best to ensure that when big decisions are made, I carefully communicate the basis for that decision. That builds trust among all

key stakeholders and makes it so much easier to fulfill organizational vision.

In my first year, I will be intentional about building relationships with the Emory Division of PT's faculty and students and with others across Emory University and Emory Healthcare. I am excited to learn more about the rich, diverse Emory University culture. At the same time, I'll be providing leadership into the development of the division's new umbrella organization, the Emory Center for Physical Therapy and Movement Science.

This is a major strategic shift that will grant Emory DPT more autonomy within the Department of Rehabilitation Medicine and will create a more collaborative environment within the School of Medicine that will enhance research, clinical care and education to improve the health of people with movement dysfunction. I look forward to sharing more about this in future editions of this publication.

While Emory DPT faculty is always looking for ways to make our curriculum as deep and diverse as possible — see the article on page 9 about the wide array of electives that make our program so appealing to current and potential students — we're also committed to developing new educational programs for students. That includes the creation of a PhD in Movement Science as well as an oncology rehabilitation residency. Stay tuned for more information on that as well.

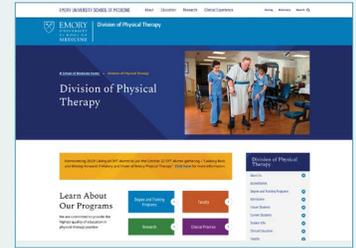
For many years, the Emory DPT Program has been recognized as a national "top 10" physical therapy program. Our goal is to be the best. I welcome any feedback and promise to review and consider all suggestions from faculty, students and alumni.

In conclusion, I highly recommend that you turn to the center spread of this magazine for an in-depth article on the 10-year anniversary of the division's first serving learning trip to the Dominican Republic. This report strikes to the heart of who we are as a division — talented physical therapists and physical therapists in training dedicated to improving the lives of those who are less fortunate not only in our local community, but in the global community as well.

I'm so proud to be part of the Emory Division of Physical Therapy and look forward to working with you to make the world a better place.

**George Fulk, PT, PhD, FAPTA**  
Professor and Director

Visit us online  
at [emorydpt.org](http://emorydpt.org)



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### Emory Physical Therapy

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# EMORY Physical Therapy



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New Emory Division of Physical Therapy Director George Fulk stands in front of the Emory School of Medicine Building.

# RENOWNED EDUCATOR, RESEARCHER GEORGE FULK A 'PERFECT FIT' AS EMORY DIVISION OF PT'S NEW DIRECTOR

For many years, new Emory Division of Physical Therapy Director George Fulk, PT, PhD, FAPTA, has been widely recognized as one of the field's brightest, most innovative educators and researchers. What may surprise those who know him is that as successful as he is, he was a relative late bloomer to the physical therapy field.

After graduating with a political science degree from Brandeis University near Boston in 1986, Fulk worked in a Boston law firm for two years and then, for nearly five years, worked in a residential home with children who were physically, sexually and emotionally abused.

While Fulk found the job rewarding, he knew that the 60- to 70-hour work week coupled with the physically and emotionally draining

nature of the position was not sustainable long term. Looking for a fresh start, he remembered the physical therapy he received in college as a member of the track and cross-country teams and called a friend who worked in a PT practice. After a few days of shadowing the friend at the clinic, Fulk knew that he had finally found his calling.

He applied and enrolled in the two-year Master of Physical Therapy program at the University of Massachusetts Lowell where he was named Graduate Student of the Year in Physical Therapy.

His rise to the top of the field was just beginning.





## Opportunities at Emory 'Limitless'

After completing his master's program, Fulk began working in inpatient rehab facilities and loved helping people get better.

"I worked primarily with people with conditions such as spinal cord and traumatic brain injuries, stroke, and Parkinson Disease," Fulks says. "I really enjoyed working with those patients and their families. It was so great to have a role in their recoveries."

Looking for another challenge in a field that he loved, Fulk accepted an adjunct teaching role at UMass Lowell and later, took a faculty role in the new PT program at Notre Dame College in Manchester, N.H. in 1999.

Knowing that he needed more education to grow in academia, Fulk, beginning in 2000, spent five years completing his PhD in physical therapy at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

In 2002, Fulk accepted a teaching position at Clarkson University in upstate New York just 30 miles south of the Canadian border. At Clarkson, Fulk cultivated a love for research, collaborating with faculty in the School of Engineering on research that used sensors to remotely monitor the movement of people with stroke at home and in their communities.

"As my career has progressed, I've definitely become more passionate about research and how it can directly translate to better outcomes for the patient," Fulk says.

At the national level, Fulk's research made him a household name in PT circles with frequent citations in research journals as well as his involvement in leadership with the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA). His role as editor of

one of the world's most popular physical therapy textbooks, *Physical Rehabilitation*, which is currently in its 7th edition, further enhanced his reputation.

Fulk stayed and thrived at Clarkson for 16 years — the last seven as department chair — before taking the role as professor and department chair of the physical therapy program at Upstate Medical University in Syracuse, NY in 2018.

There, he gained even more influence on a campus that featured the only academic medical center in Central New York, with over 10,000 employees and a large research budget.

"I had no plans to leave Upstate but then people at Emory called and persuaded me to apply here," Fulk, who, previously knew very little about Emory, explains. "During that application and interview process, the more I learned about Emory and the opportunities here, the more interested I became."

With all three of his children grown and graduated from college, Fulk and his wife knew there was nothing preventing them from moving south. After an extensive interview process, Fulk accepted the offer to become the Emory Division of Physical Therapy director.

"I quickly learned that the opportunities here at Emory are limitless," Fulk says. "In my experiences at different institutions, there's always been a ceiling on what you can do. I don't see any ceiling at Emory."

Another factor in his decision to come to Atlanta was the reputation of the faculty at the Emory Division of PT.

"We have amazing faculty dedicated to the students, the program and the profession," he says. "They're so innovative and I'm excited to get to know them better and join them in what they are doing."





One of Fulk's favorite pastimes is watching his beloved Boston Red Sox play. Fulk enjoys a game at Boston's Fenway Park with his sons, Kyle (left) and Connor.

## An Inclusive, Studious Leader

In 2010, Emory DPT Professor Edelle Field-Fote, new into her role as editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Neurologic Physical Therapy* (JNPT), needed a digital media editor for the journal. It was essential to find someone with a strong neuro background and an excellent reputation in the field. For Field-Fote, George Fulk was an obvious choice. She was thrilled when Fulk accepted and together for the next 10 years, the two teamed with others to make the journal one of the world's most cited in neurologic physical therapy.

When Field-Fote's term ended in 2020, Fulk succeeded her as editor-in-chief, a role he has today. While Field-Fote has always valued Fulk's "excellent, broad knowledge of the entire physical therapy profession," she's even more impressed with him as a person.

"When I think of George, the first thing that comes to mind is what a good person he is," Field-Fote says. "He is a genuinely good, kind, caring person."

Field-Fote, who served on the faculty search committee for the new director, knew that when she saw Fulk's application, he was serious about coming to Atlanta as he is not the type to just use the process as leverage with his current employer.

"When he decides that he's going to be involved with something, those are very important decisions to him," she explains. "He takes those decisions very seriously. He's a researcher and he does the research that's needed to understand the problem so he can think of solutions that are truly meaningful and viable.

"I think those are the things that are really going to serve him well in a leadership role. People want to work with him because he's a good person and he brings to the relationship a thorough understanding of the issue he's dealing with as he has done his homework before he gets to the table."

Former Emory Division of Physical Therapy Interim Director and Professor Marie Johanson, PT, PhD, who served on a year-long APTA leadership fellowship with Fulk in 2015, echoed Field-Fote's sentiments calling him "the perfect fit" for Emory DPT.

"His leadership style is very inclusive and he's very studious," Johanson says. "He doesn't make impulsive decisions and is methodical. He will talk to all the right people and he'll take the time to really research the issue to try to come up with, overall, the best solution."

Perhaps Fulk's reputation as a methodical consensus builder can be traced to his roots. His father served in the Peace Corps and the United Nations and Fulk's childhood was spent in several different places including Chile and Pakistan before settling in Newton, Mass. for his high school years.

Before taking the helm of the Emory Division of PT June 1, Fulk had already won over a majority of the division's faculty by negotiating the creation of the new Emory Center for Physical Therapy and Movement Science, a step that keeps the division under the Department of Rehabilitation Medicine but gives it more autonomy. As the head of the new center, Fulk reports directly to the dean of the Emory School of Medicine.

Long-time Emory Division of PT Professor Steven Wolf, PT, PhD, FAPTA, who got to know Fulk in his leadership role at the *Journal of Neurologic Physical Therapy*, applauded Fulk for his "strong sense of vision and keen mind as an administrator."

"He's smart enough not to walk in and say, 'This is how we're going to do it,'" Wolf says. "Instead, he's a consensus builder. He's a team player.

"My feeling from watching him in faculty meetings we've had thus far is that he's a very keen observer. He absorbs a lot of information before he says something. He's very pensive in his approach. He is a good listener who comes back with questions as needed. He's good at analyzing information that is going to help foster his own vision."

While Fulk realizes that his path in physical therapy has been anything but linear, he jokingly says that his political science degree helps him "navigate the political waters of being a director."

## No More Shoveling Snow

Fulk will continue to cultivate his passion for research at Emory — he's currently working on an NIH grant that looks at how sleep directly impacts the recovery of people with stroke — but in his first year as director, he is zeroed in on getting to know faculty members and learning the culture of both the division and the university. As part of that effort, he wants to create a small group of faculty members to meet with and learn from. Whatever decisions he makes as a leader, he wants to be intentional about creating a transparent environment.

"As a leader, I think it's important to ensure that people are getting the same information that I'm getting to help make decisions so that they understand what the basis for those decisions are," he says.

Fulk also looks forward to supporting newer or junior-level faculty with their professional development by helping them make connections and finding opportunities outside of Emory that will further their careers.

Outside the classroom, Fulk loves Boston sports teams — especially the Boston Red Sox — and about three years ago, he discovered a love for mountain biking that has allowed him to disconnect from the rigors of leadership, research and teaching. He rides his mountain bike about three or four times a week and has already identified several places to ride around Metro Atlanta.

"With road biking, when riding on the road, you don't really have to pay attention the whole time and you can think about work and other matters too much," Fulk says. "But with mountain biking, you've got to be in the moment. There is always some obstacle in the path so when you start wandering off with other thoughts, you could be in trouble and end up wrecking. So, the nice thing about mountain biking is that I can focus just on trying to stay upright and not hurt myself."

While Field-Fote, a New England native herself, wonders how Fulk, who has spent most of his life in the northeast, will adapt to Georgia's steamy summers, Fulk insists the trade-off will be well worth it.

"It'll be so nice not to have to shovel snow in the winter," he says. **EPT**



## Linda Thumba Working to Improve Rehab System in South Africa

2012 Emory DPT graduate Linda (Kambule) Thumba left PT school thinking that she would take a simple, direct path to sports rehabilitation. Thumba, who served as a student athletic trainer for the University of Maryland football team during her undergraduate years, interviewed at several outpatient orthopedic centers along the East Coast and came close to accepting a position. But the pull to make a difference in her homeland of South Africa was just too great.

Thumba, who was born in North Carolina to South African parents and lived in South Africa for a brief time as a child, eventually moved to South Africa to begin an arduous two-year process of getting a rehabilitation license there. She volunteered in a rural hospital in Mehikeng and then, as part of a year-long community service requirement, served in a large, peri-urban hospital in Johannesburg. What she quickly learned was that rehabilitation had little priority within the country's health care system.

"The emphasis in the health community there is on emergency and chronic medical conditions, not rehabilitation," Thumba says. "In the 800-bed hospital where I ended up working, I think there were about five of us in the department."

After getting her license and fulfilling her community service requirement, Thumba worked in the South African private sector and became burdened by major systemic inadequacies as the bulk of her caseload was related to respiratory conditions and linked to HIV/tuberculosis coinfection.

"By the time I was seeing them as a rehab specialist, I was seeing people who were extremely debilitated with low functionality," she explains.

After working in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for a year and serving another two-year stint in rehab in South Africa, Thumba and her husband moved back to the United States to give birth to her second daughter and take a break to raise her two girls, who are now 7 and 5 years old.

She then worked as a pediatric therapist at a medical center in Maryland before leaving that to pursue a Master of Public Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Today, as she continues in the MPH program, she is serving as a member of the gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) working group of the Learning, Acting and Building for Rehabilitation in Health Systems (ReLAB-HS) project. The five-year, \$39 million project, funded by USAID, brings together a consortium of John Hopkins University, the University of Melbourne and four other non-profit partners to address the lack of, and inadequate access to, essential rehabilitation services in low- and middle-income countries.

As a working group member, Thumba has developed an online course titled "Introduction to Gender Equality and Social Inclusion" intended to introduce GESI concepts and promote GESI responsiveness among clinicians. She has also written a blog on the ReLAB-HS website and is working on other pieces that are expected to be published.

Once her MPH is completed, Thumba wants to take her experience at Johns Hopkins and ReLAB-HS to strengthen the rehabilitation system in South Africa.

"The goal would be to work toward increased awareness of the benefits of rehabilitation within these communities in South Africa and set it as a higher priority within the health system and the political landscape."

While the past 10 years have been a "long, windy road" for Thumba, she fondly remembers her time at Emory calling it a "phenomenal place to get my career started."

"I loved the preparation that the program gives for you to be as general as possible, but at the same time, knowledgeable within different areas of rehabilitation," she says. "Just being in a nurturing environment with a faculty that cares so deeply about what they're doing was inspiring."

**EPT**

## Atlanta Run Club Founder James Ro Making a Difference in Wellness, Social Activism



After graduating from the Emory Doctor of Physical Therapy Program in 2016, James Ro knew that his career road was going to look quite a bit different than his Emory classmates. As a physical therapist, Ro loves the relational side of the profession and the idea of leading a patient on a pain-to-progress journey, but he has always had a creative side and a desire to cultivate his love for branding, graphic design and photography.

During the six years after graduation, Ro has figured out a way to blend those passions through an activity that, growing up, he never liked — running. In 2018, Ro created the Atlanta Run Club (ARC), a wellness group that not only runs together, but is actively building a brand that emphasizes community, diversity and social justice.

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 13**



## For Last Ten Years, Emory DPT Trips to Dominican Republic *Reduce Suffering, Gain Worldwide Recognition*

In 2012, Emory DPT Professor Sara Pullen, DPT, MPH, CHES, traveled to the Dominican Republic (DR) by herself to assess the physical therapy needs of the city of San Francisco de Macorís on the northeast side of the country. Pullen, newly hired by the division at the time to bring her vast public and global health experience into the curriculum, was laying the groundwork for an annual service-learning trip for Emory DPT students.

Ten years and nine DR service-learning trips later — the 2021 trip was cancelled due to COVID — Pullen and her team of former and current students have made an indelible mark in the San Francisco de Macorís community. With no medications or high-tech equipment, the teams, using primarily just their hands, have alleviated suffering for scores of individuals who, previously, had no access to rehabilitation services.

For Pullen, it's hard not to get emotional when she talks about her health care colleagues and patients in the DR. She refers to them as family and insists that the trip will always be part of her life.

Never mind that her workdays in the oppressive Dominican heat begin at 6 a.m. and end at midnight and that she is physically and mentally exhausted by the time she and her team arrive back in Atlanta a week later. From the very beginning, Pullen reminds her students that despite its luxurious coastal resorts, the DR is a country of extreme poverty and the trip is anything but a "tropical vacation."

But what the students do get to experience are events that will be etched in their minds forever — like when a man in his 40s with cerebral palsy learns to stand up for the first time while his family cheers him on. Or when a patient's face lights up when she learns, for the first time, that she doesn't have to live her life in constant pain. Or the feeling that medically underserved people get when they realize that people who've never met them see them as important and valuable.

For Pullen, whose annual arrival in San Francisco de Macorís is now met with great anticipation by many of the citizens there, this is why she chose physical therapy to begin with. And the students who accompany her soon learn, it's they — more than the people they are treating — who are changed.

## Despite Difficult Conditions, Students Flourish

2022 Emory DPT graduate Ashton Ritchie will never forget the pressure that she felt on her first day of the trip at a Dominican Republic health clinic in March as patients began flooding

in for long-awaited help for a wide variety of physical ailments.

"I remember thinking, 'Oh my goodness, how am I going to make it here?'" Ritchie says.

But throughout the week, the 10-student team rose to the challenge as their confidence as caregivers skyrocketed.

"On the last day, we were treating patients with limited supervision and by the end of these sessions, our patients were saying, 'Oh, my pain is so much better,'" Ritchie remembers. "Just being able to see that I could trust myself to provide physical therapy and do so in a different language was really gratifying. I gained so much confidence in my skills as a clinician and will carry this experience with me throughout my entire career."

2017 Emory DPT graduate Tiernan Damas and 2013 Emory DPT graduate Lucia Rodriguez both visited the DR on service-learning trips as students and now are co-leaders on the annual trip with Pullen. Pullen refers to the three as a "sisterhood."

According to Damas, who practices in an outpatient clinic in Washington, D.C., the baptism-by-fire approach for students in the DR makes the future clinicians so much stronger.

"You're not used to seeing 15 patients in one morning," Damas says. "That's not something a typical PT will do and it's not something that they will probably do again. But there, you're trying to get through all these patients because it'll be another year before they have access to a rehab professional."





“You have to quickly assess in a different language and then also try and figure out what you should do with that situation. So, as a student, it can be overwhelming and tiring, but it’s also really rewarding.”

2022 Emory DPT graduate Haley Zellner was also on the March trip and recalls meeting a man who had suffered a stroke a couple of years ago and was overwhelmed with despair because he was unable to provide for his family due to physical limitations.

“We were able to get him out of bed and get him dressed and show him the things that he could do,” Zellner recalls. “We worked on certain interventions and as a result, he gained much more movement in his leg and arm. The whole family was just emotional and grateful.”

Each night, after a long day of work in a different community, the students would huddle and share stories from the day.

“We would all debrief together at the dinner table and the first night, there wasn’t a dry eye at the table just talking about the patients we saw and just the way that they impacted us personally,” Zellner says.

Since starting the DR trip 10 years ago, Pullen emphatically sets the tone for all students who sign up to serve each year. First, prior to going, every student must either be fluent in Spanish or complete the Spanish for Physical Therapists elective. She also asks students to refrain from speaking English to each other in the presence of Dominican patients.

“That sounds extreme, but I try to put myself in the place of a patient,” Pullen says. “You’re already in a vulnerable position health wise and if someone is talking about you in a language you don’t understand, think about how scary that might feel.”

Furthermore, Pullen fiercely guards against her group adopting what she described as a “colonialist mentality” that positions themselves as experts coming in to “fix” communities.

“We are coming in as people with a certain skill set who are learning from the community health workers who are already there,” Pullen explains, “and we’re asking them questions so we know how our skills can best be incorporated into what they are already doing to help.”

While the community health workers there are government employees who are not licensed clinicians — in fact, physical therapy is not part of the DR’s National Health System — they have already gained the trust of the citizens and know the unique health care needs of their community, Pullen says.

“Basically, I consider them bridges to care,” she continues. “We are on one side of the bridge, they are the bridge, and the patient is on the other side. So, without them, we couldn’t properly get to the patient or the community in the way that would be most helpful.”

The success that Pullen, Damas and Rodriguez have enjoyed in alleviating suffering in San Francisco de Macoris has garnered the attention of the World Health Organization (WHO). In July, the three traveled to Lisbon, Portugal to present a paper chronicling their DR experiences to the International Society of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation.

As a result, Pullen was asked to serve as a consultant to the WHO as part of the organization’s Rehabilitation 2030 initiative, a worldwide effort to expand physical therapy globally — especially to residents in medically underserved countries. Calling the project an “answer to my dreams,”

Pullen insists that no matter what her role is on the world stage, her heart will remain in the Dominican Republic.

“When I was talking to my Dominican partners and friends about the World Health Organization opportunity, I say, ‘I will always come back here. I will come here every single year,’” she says. “And the only thing that I would change is that I would stay a little longer. One week is not quite enough.”

## A Story of a Life Changed

Six years ago, Pullen and her team met José, a man in his 40s with cerebral palsy who she described as “half lying and half sitting on a dirt floor in his house.” Cared for by his mother, José’s only way of moving would be to sit cross legged, place his palms on the ground and push up with his hands so that his body would lift off the ground. Wheelchairs aren’t an option due to the area’s rocky, hilly dirt terrain.

Noticing how strong José’s arms were and that, essentially, he was doing triceps push-ups to move around, Pullen had an idea.

“So, there was sort of a low chair around and we practiced two or three times and he pushed himself up to sit in his chair on the patio at his house,” Pullen says. “All of a sudden, he can see out the windows and he can see out the door because he is not on the floor anymore.”

On her next visit, Pullen brought a higher chair and some exercise bands for José along with some exercise instructions. Today, Pullen notes that because he can now sit upright on a higher chair, she can see José from the window as she approaches his house. The focus then shifted to strengthening José’s legs.

“We got him to move his legs and since we had a walker with us, he stood for the first time in his life with a walker in his 40s,” Pullen recalls. “And once he was able to stand, we challenged him to begin marching in place for the year to get his spine straightened out.”

Today, after a couple more visits by Pullen and her team as well as some telehealth calls with Dr. David Burke, chairman of Emory’s Department of Rehabilitation Medicine, José is now walking, can navigate his entire house and use the bathroom without any assistance.

“I just have such a full heart for this person,” Pullen says. “I can’t imagine the resilience and the strength it takes just to be in his body every day.”

In the past, Pullen was used to bringing medical supplies and exercise equipment to help José gain some mobility. These days, José, a talented artist who spends his days painting, requests that Pullen bring him canvases and painting supplies. Pullen obliges and recently, she says, he painted a “beautiful picture” for her.

“He’s someone who I am so honored to know,” Pullen says. “Whenever I think to myself, ‘Ok, what is this trip about?’ This is what it’s about, right? It’s about José and so many more like him.” **EPT**

## For Emory DPT Students, Electives Add Value, Bring Clarity to Career Endeavors



Several Emory DPT students enjoy yoga workouts in front of the School of Medicine as part of one of the Emory DPT program's electives, Yoga and Meditation/Mindfulness in Physical Therapy.

2022 Emory DPT graduate Peter San Pedro views himself not just as a physical therapist, but as an entrepreneur and future small business owner. Unlike many new PT graduates who begin their careers working for a large, commercial rehab entity, San Pedro wants to start a gym that provides physical therapy and keep the patient/customer experience as personal as possible.

While San Pedro minored in business during his undergraduate days at the University of Central Florida and learned business basics such as accounting and finance, it wasn't until he took Emory DPT elective Business Management for the Physical Therapy Entrepreneur by Emory DPT Associate Professor Beth Davis, PT, DPT, MBA, FNAP, did he feel that "spark" that he could turn his dream into a reality.

"I left pretty much every single lecture in that class fired up to go do my own thing," San Pedro says. "When I left that course, I told Dr. Davis that this course should be mandatory for everyone who goes through this program."

The physical therapy entrepreneur course is just one of 26 elective courses offered to third-year Emory DPT students who are coming back to campus after fulfilling their clinical education requirements. Students are required to take at least four electives ranging from more traditional PT offerings such as Advanced Acute Care, Advanced Human Anatomy and Sports Physical Therapy to non-traditional classes like Dry Needling, Pilates for the Rehabilitation Professional and From Kitchen to Clinic: Applied Nutrition for Physical Therapists.

According to Emory DPT Professor Marie Johanson, PT, PhD, who chairs the curriculum committee that determines the elective courses, the committee looks for course ideas that add to the diversity of the offering of electives.

"We don't want it to be all orthopedic, sports or neuro, so we look for a variety of different areas or patient populations that students would work with," Johanson explains. "So, if a new proposal addresses a different population, that's compelling."

"The latest example of that is prosthetics. We have some content in the core curriculum about patients with amputations. But to have a more specialized look at lower extremity prosthetics and gait with prosthetics, that's a different population than manual therapy."

Furthermore, Johanson says that no matter how trendy or innovative a course idea may be, it must be evidence-based to be added to the Emory DPT electives curriculum.

"We don't offer courses that may be really interesting and fun, but don't have any research backing," Johanson says. "It must be an evidence-based approach in physical therapy. We ask anybody submitting a proposal to supply references that support that area practice or the content that they would be teaching."

Johanson adds that Emory DPT's wide array of electives are probably not unique in comparison to other PT schools, but what differentiates Emory is that after students have completed all their clinical requirements, they have two full semesters on campus to take their four electives while completing their research and other required courses.

2022 Emory DPT graduate Jessica Boose, who took the same physical therapy entrepreneur course as San Pedro, said that Emory's impressive catalog of electives played a big part in her decision to come to Emory.

"When I was looking at schools, knowing the electives in general, especially the entrepreneur elective, was a big draw to Emory for me," Boose says. "I remember talking about it in my interview and it was on my radar from the get-go."

Boose, who is starting her career as a traveling PT, came into the class with a desire to, one day, start her own clinic but was unsure if she had the business acumen to do it.

"After taking the class, it completely confirmed that desire and it made me so much more confident in being able to do so," Boose says. "It got me more excited throughout the semester because we go through business cases of companies that are pretty well known and then apply it to a physical therapy business model."

For San Pedro, who currently runs his own online training service, Bandit Rising, the entrepreneur course, with only six other students, provided an intimate environment to study big-name companies like Apple, Starbucks and Toyota and learn how to apply business strategies to physical therapy.

"We talked everything from money, getting your LLC and how to do the marketing," San Pedro explains. "Dr. Davis brought in guest speakers who broke everything down step-by-step showing us how we could set up our own clinic."

As students finish their clinicals and near graduation, many of them are inclined to take their careers in a specific direction but may not have clarity. The electives, Johanson said, are designed to bring that clarity.

"This is content that's way over and above what you need to enter into practice, but it adds so much value by preparing students at a much higher level," she says.

Johanson added that completing some Emory electives, like dry needling, vestibular rehabilitation and strength and conditioning, provides students national certification in those areas and prepares them better for national exams. **EPT**

## After 37 Years at Emory Division of PT, Professor Pat Nichols Retires Leaving a Legacy of Love and Enthusiasm



In January 1985, shortly after moving to Atlanta from Seattle, Pat Nichols, BSc, taught her first physiology class at Emory on an adjunct basis and would fill in whenever and wherever she was needed teaching students in master's level physical therapy, medical or undergraduate nursing — virtually any students who needed physiology.

"I used to joke, 'Have car, will teach physiology,'" Nichols laughs. More than 37 years later, Nichols was the guest of honor at an August retirement reception celebrating one of the most beloved professors and colleagues in the Division of Physical Therapy's history. For Emory DPT faculty members who took Nichols' class as a student and later worked alongside her on the faculty, her enthusiasm for teaching and love for her students and colleagues can never be replaced.

"It's that passion," says Emory DPT Associate Professor Beth Davis, PT, DPT, MBA, FNAP, who proudly has kept all the notes she took as a student in Nichols' class in the mid 1990s. "And she's so brilliant that when she goes through her illustrations and diagrams, she paints a story down to this very cellular, small level. You're in it with her and then she brings it back to how it impacts our practice, how it impacts patients and how it impacts our evaluation and treatment. Not every teacher can do that. She's just amazing and on top of that, so likable."

Emory DPT Professor Sarah Blanton, PT, DPT, FNAP, another former student of Nichols' from the early 1990s, praised Nichols for her gift of challenging students while at the same time, nurturing them.

"I think why students adore her so is this sense of joy that she brings," Blanton says. "I use that word intentionally because joy is not just happiness. It's really a mixture, in this case, of someone who loves the content she teaches, treasures her students and is humbled and grateful for the opportunity."

"She had such meaning and purpose in her work by truly loving to see her students grow. When you wrap that into a package, it comes out as her radiating this joy in the classroom. It was infectious and as a student, you loved learning from Pat."

Nichols credits her students through the years for giving her life "such meaning" and hopes they remember her for more than physiology.

"In a classroom, you teach much more than the subject at hand," Nichols says. "You teach a lot of intangibles about how you treat other people. You teach about openness, humor and optimism. I always tried to 'demystify' the more difficult topics. So, I hope that my students will

think of me with some of those intangibles in mind."

While many marvel at Nichols' unbridled enthusiasm for such a complex subject as physiology, for Nichols, that came easily.

"Systems physiology, cellular events and the mechanism of how the cell does its business or even how a drug influences the systems, has always fascinated me," Nichols explains. "It's just intriguing. The more you learn, the more you connect the dots and the more exciting it gets. So, it was never hard for me to be enthusiastic."

Her love for physiology, coupled with her love for Emory, made for a perfect marriage. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median number of years that current employees stay with an employer is just over four years. Nichols, who became an assistant professor at Emory two years after her arrival, credits her longevity to the fact that at Emory, she never stopped growing professionally.

### I THINK WHY STUDENTS ADORE HER SO IS THIS SENSE OF JOY THAT SHE BRINGS — SARAH BLANTON

My role at Emory was always changing and growing and it was just a super fit for me," Nichols says. "I think what I found in the division, even when I was just teaching one course, was a community of people who had a passion for education. That's not always the case in institutions. I felt valued."

"I always felt that I could personally grow in that environment and gain confidence. And, as I gained confidence, my role in the program grew. Those wonderful gifts about the division just kept on giving."

In retirement, Nichols plans to spend more time with her family: Georgia Tech Professor Richard Nichols, her two sons and three grandchildren. She also looks forward to reading, traveling to her native England, indulging in conversations with friends and enjoying her favorite pastime, gardening.

"It's very exciting to now have some more time and should be easy to have a lot of fun," she says.

According to Blanton, not having Nichols around day-to-day will be a major adjustment for the entire faculty.

"I absolutely just treasure her," Blanton says. "She is so symbolic of Emory. Maybe the people who have the hardest adjustment to her retirement may not be her, but it will be us. It's so hard to imagine Emory without Pat." **EPT**

2022 CLINICAL PARTNER AWARD

## Encompass Health Rehab Hospital in Miami Recognized as Top Clinical Partner

For many years, Encompass Health Rehabilitation Hospital of Miami has served as a faithful partner in providing clinical rotations for about six Emory DPT students a year. This year, the 60-bed rehab hospital in South Florida was recognized by Emory DPT with the 2022 Clinical Partner Award.



Nikie Lo

Encompass Health Physical Therapist Nikie Lo, who stepped into the hospital's student coordinator role this year, her 11th year at the hospital, remembers how her love for physical therapy grew during her student clinical rotations. She is committed to ensuring that Emory DPT students also embrace the profession during their 10-week clinicals in Miami.

"We want to make sure that they feel comfortable here," Lo explains. "As part of that, communication has to be open and they should always feel comfortable asking me for help."

As a student coordinator, Lo stresses the importance of patient communication from the first day and loves to watch the progression of each student.

"When they leave here, they are functioning as therapists, like each one of us," Lo says. "They become much more independent, they're much more confident in their treatment sessions and they've built a better rapport with the patients."

Lo, who has worked with students from several schools during her career at Encompass Health — her first one was 10 years ago from Emory — explained why Emory students are among her favorites.

"They are always well prepared and always well rounded," she says. "Also, they're very sociable, interactive and they communicate very well. When they get here, Emory students are ready to go in the clinical setting." **EPT**

2022 CLINICAL EDUCATOR AWARDS

## Emory Brain Center's Keenan Whitesides Enjoys Watching Students' Confidence Grow in Neuro PT

As a neurological physical therapist at the Emory Health Brain Center in Atlanta for the past seven years, Keenan Whitesides, PT, DPT, NCS, has worked with enough students to know that because of the specialized nature of her profession, rotations with her usually begin with a lot of student nerves and apprehension.

But for Whitesides, who was named recipient of Emory DPT's 2022 Clinical Educator Award, watching the students' confidence blossom over a 10-week period in her clinic is a process that never gets old.

"The most gratifying thing for me," she says, "is to see them become invested in the patient's performance and really feel that sense of pride and confidence in being able to make somebody's life better."

While only a small number of her students will go on to specialize in neurology, the experience at the brain center gives them a "different lens on

the way that they interact with patients in the future," Whitesides adds.

Whitesides, who also works with students from another university, described the typical Emory student whom she works with on an annual basis.

"I love working with Emory students because

they're so dedicated to trying to be the best possible therapists that they can be," she says. "They bring a really strong work ethic to the clinic and they also bring a level of curiosity and interest about neurology in particular, but also patient care in general." **EPT**



Christina Diggs (left) and Keenan Whitesides

## Christina Diggs Instills Confidence, Trains Students to Leave as Clinicians

Having graduated from the University of Southern California Doctor of Physical Therapy Program in 2016, former Emory University Hospital Midtown Physical Therapist Christina Diggs, PT, DPT, vividly remembers what it was like to treat patients for the first time as a student.

That's why when one Emory Midtown patient recently asked an Emory DPT student to leave the room because she didn't want to be treated by a student, Diggs sent the shaken student right back into the patient's room.

"I said, 'No, no, no. Go back in there or we'll go in there together,'" Diggs recalls.

From there, the student collected herself and returned to the hospital room and confidently explained to the patient her role in improving that patient's health. The patient accepted her.

For Diggs, the recipient of the 2022 Emory DPT Clinical Educator Award, instilling confidence in her students is just as important as conveying clinical expertise.

"It's so important to own who you are as a clinician when you walk in a room," she says. "It is asserting who you are and what you have to offer to the patient."

For Diggs, who recently left Emory Midtown to serve as a traveling physical therapist, the joy of watching her students grow as physical therapists — she trained about two Emory DPT students a year — is something she will always cherish.

"To me, they come in as students and they leave as clinicians," Diggs says. **EPT**

# Class of 2022 Student Awards

Each year the Division of Physical Therapy presents awards to graduating students

**Director's Award for Academic Excellence** | This award was given to **Elizabeth Eidson, Melissa Hamby, Charlotte Sylvester and Haley Zellner** in recognition of exceptional academic work.

**Director's Award for Excellence in Growth Mindset** | This award acknowledged **Kayla Byrd, Victoria Florczyk, Caren McCarthy and Madison Robinson** for modeling perseverance and courage in meeting challenges and who, through hard work and dedication, demonstrate resilience and a love of learning.

**Excellence in Service Award** | This award recognized **Katie Carter, Jamie Fleshman, Rachana Patel and Whitney Stroup** for outstanding service contributions to the program and/or physical therapy's professional association.

**Frances A. Curtiss Award for Excellence in Community Service** | This award recognized the outstanding service contributions of **Bridget Ochuko, Ashton Ritchie, Whitney Stroup, Emily Tarnacki and Haley Zellner** to the community at the local, national or international level.

**Frank S. Blanton Humanities in Rehabilitation Scholar Award** | This award was presented to **Jamie Fleshman** for being dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge in the humanities, demonstrating a deep desire to foster awareness of humanities in health professions and exhibiting kindness and compassion in relating with others.

**Ian H. Tovin Scholarship Award** | This award was given to **Kendall Henry and Corey Rodrigo** in recognition of outstanding performance throughout the program and an intention to focus on orthopedics after graduation.

**Johnnie Morgan Award for Excellence in Clinical Science** | This award was given to **Nela Handac, Kendall Henry, Lillian Marttala and Cristina Sanchez** for going above and beyond what is expected of students during their clinical affiliations.

**Journal of Humanities in Rehabilitation Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Humanism Scholar Award** | This award was given to **Jamie Fleshman and Bridget Ochuko**.

**Pamela A. Catlin Award for Excellence in Critical Inquiry** | This award was given to **Alexa Beovich, Jessica Boose, Melissa Hamby, Shiyu Lin, Rachana Patel and Chelsea Rodriguez** who were deemed by the faculty and their research advisers to have shown leadership, mastery of content knowledge, problem-solving ability, enthusiasm, and value to overall research projects.

**Susan J. Herdman Award for Excellence in Clinical Practice** | This award was given to **Halle Geoghegan, Bridget Ochuko, Dhruvi Patel and Corey Rodrigo** for exemplifying the drive to advance the profession and who demonstrated knowledge and skills in a specialized area of patient care.

**Zoher F. Kapasi Award for Excellence in Leadership** | This award was given to **Katie Carter, Savannah Hood and Rika Jitosh** for showing considerable initiative and organizational skills related to class and program activities.



Alexa Beovich



Jessica Boose



Kayla Byrd



Katherine Carter



Elizabeth Edison



Jamie Fleshman



Victoria Florczyk



Halle Geoghegan



Melissa Hamby



Nela Handac



Kendall Henry



Savannah Hood



Rika Jitosh



Shiyu Lin



Lillian Marttala



Caren McCarthy



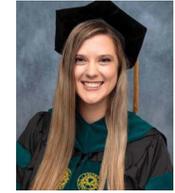
Bridget Ochuko



Dhruvi Patel



Rachana Patel



Ashton Ritchie



Madison Robinson



Corey Rodrigo



Chelsea Rodriguez



Cristina Sanchez



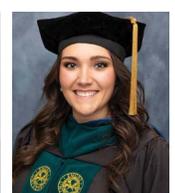
Whitney Stroup



Charlotte Sylvester



Emily Tarnacki



Haley Zellner

## ALUMNI NOTES



**Daniel Brandon, 18DPT**, is working as a clinical specialist with Agiliti Health where he provides clinical support for Agiliti's specialty bed frames, support surfaces and bariatric equipment. His work focuses on helping hospitals across the Midwest prevent falls, decrease pressure injuries and improve safe patient handling.

**Natalia Busuttill, 19DPT**, recently completed her Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) from Emory University's Distance Accelerated BSN program. After being furloughed by a national physical therapy company during COVID, Busuttill decided to explore more areas of the medical field. She currently works as an RN in a hospital ICU and is pursuing the opportunity to also serve as a PRN physical therapist at the same hospital. After gaining some experience as an RN, she plans to apply to school to become a certified registered nurse anesthetist.



**Danielle and Jordan Felsberg, 13DPT**, recently celebrated the birth of their fifth child, Willow. Danielle received her PhD in Kinesiology and both started as assistant professors at Wingate University's DPT program in Charlotte, NC.

**Joseph Graves, 13DPT**, was recently promoted to program director for the Physical Therapist Assistant Program at Concorde Career College.

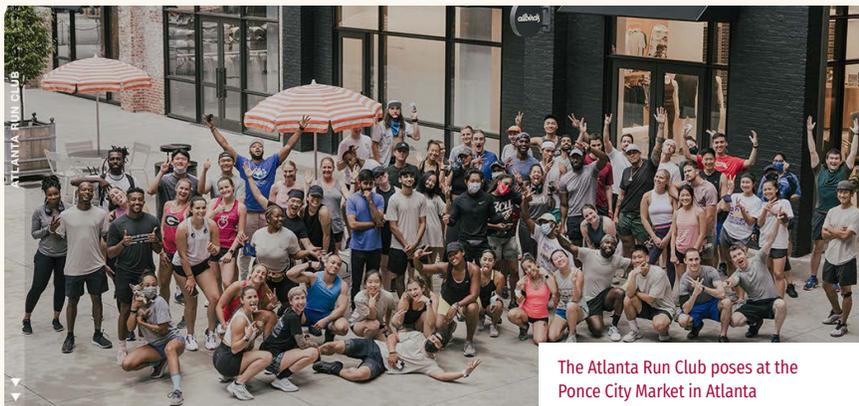


**Courtney Beshel Johnson, 17DPT**, and her husband, Tyler, recently celebrated the birth of their daughter, Brooke. Johnson is a physical therapist at PT Solutions.

**Dustin Lee, 16DPT**, is the owner and founder of Reach Physical Therapy in Atlanta, Ga. The clinic opened in March 2022 and proudly serves patients — especially those who have not had success elsewhere — by creating sustainable solutions to their orthopedic and sport physical therapy needs. The clinic also serves the greater Atlanta community by offering fundraising opportunities, involvement in local organization events and participation with health initiatives across the area.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5



The Atlanta Run Club poses at the Ponce City Market in Atlanta

"It's been an unusual journey but I'm so grateful to experience community in this way," Ro says. "To be able to combine the entrepreneurial spirit that I have with all that I learned in PT school to generate a community like this, it truly is a special feeling."

While running is what initially brings wellness-minded people to ARC, Ro says that the social component of the club is what keeps them there. The club hosts weekly runs throughout Atlanta and boasts nearly 6,000 Instagram followers and more than 3,000 followers connected on Strava — a social networking app for athletes. ARC, unlike most other running clubs, has no membership roster or dues.

"If you show up and run, you're part of the club," says Ro. "We're trying to eliminate the barriers or anything that might rub off as hyper competitive or elitist while emphasizing the social aspect of it above everything."

Last year, in the wake of a shooting spree in three Atlanta-area spas that killed eight people — six of whom were women of Asian descent — Ro and the ARC led a fundraising campaign, Stop Asian Hate, that resulted in more than 20,000 miles ran by ARC followers and more than \$20,000 raised for families of victims.

As the club grows in numbers, Ro, who is Korean American, is energized by the influence that it can have in a culture in dire need of leadership.

"We have a group of dedicated runners and a brand that is growing in influence," says Ro. "With issues like Stop Asian Hate, we could really be such a powerful vehicle for social and environmental change."

Currently, Ro is working on plans to integrate ARC with his physical therapy background to create a fitness and wellness studio that offers physical therapy, fitness classes and sports performance training while serving as a "social lounge" and community organization that values activism.

When Ro remembers his days at Emory, he is thankful for the opportunity to be grounded "in the principles of sound physical therapy treatment," but is equally grateful for the professors who encouraged him to pursue his passions outside of physical therapy.

"The faculty there gave me the freedom to dream big and pursue bigger things," he says. "They recognized that I had a creative burst and they reciprocated that with encouragement. I really appreciate that." **EPT**



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# *Congratulations* Class of 2022

