

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Hello Members of APTA Alaska:

I wish you all the best in this challenging year of pandemic, economic strain and a release of pent up frustrations and protest related to racial injustices in our country. It's a time of serious reflection but also of action. Please join me as you consider each challenge and think, how can you act to make something, anything, better.

On behalf of APTA Alaska's Board of Directors, we are disappointed that we are unable to hold the Fall Conference at Alyeska in person this year. We are very aware of the importance of networking and in-person gathering for all of our members. When we reflected on our roles as health care providers, weighed our fiduciary responsibility to the chapter, and evaluated what an in-person event would look like with the COVID crisis in Alaska not improving, we concluded the most sound decision was to transition the in-person conference to a virtual one. Change does bring us opportunities and we were able to recruit two renowned authors speaking on their approaches to tendon injuries along with another speaker leading a brief discussion of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) virtually, on October 17.

I'm especially excited for the talk on DEI as one of APTA's core values is to improve the health of society. The death of George Floyd sparked needed attention across our country and exposed, once again, the racial injustices that have plagued our country and continue to do so. Pretending to live our country's or our association's values is impossible while racism exists. We are at a flashpoint in history and if APTA can assist in leveling the playing field for those in our community who meet obstacles because of skin color, we will be a better country as a result and we can all be even more proud of our profession. There are multiple sessions on DEI coming forward from APTA. Racism is a disease of the heart and mind and our Fall Conference course will focus on what you can do. Racism ultimately affects health care.

COVID Mandate Updates: APTA was recently recognized as an association that has led admirably during the pandemic, www.apta.org/news/2020/08/13/asae--recognition-august. Our association has provided excellent guidance, resources and even emotional support in a challenging climate. In a time of great need, APTA has been a trusted resource for the profession. We are still right in the middle of it. Click [HERE](#) for APTA's latest updates and [COVID 19 resources](#) for practitioners and clinic owners.

Locally, we have made every effort we could as well to provide information so professionals could make the best educated decisions. I'm very proud of the way this state chapter provided information and guidance. I have personally fielded many questions seeking guidance. Early on in Alaska, just as nationally, there was vocal outcry as some PTs called for mandating closure of outpatient physical therapy clinics from APTA. This was admirably from the "do no harm" spirit of stopping a pandemic and flattening the curve. If in your clinical judgment, that is the best path, of course, that is the best action to take.

Unfortunately, the encouragement of mandating closure, opposing CDC and state guidelines, reveals the desire for clinical decisions to be taken from the professionals who have earned this autonomy over decades and decades of struggle. This is not who we are and locally and nationally APTA allowed the evidence to speak, professionals to make their own decisions, and it was a success, helping many patients through a challenging time. Rightly, we bristle at the thought of employers impeding our professional judgment and this was a situation with parallels. It was a revealing time for our profession and my hope is that we will come out stronger. Like osteoblasts and fibroblasts, a little stress and strain leads to stronger tissue. We will come through this storm stronger and more cohesive. The continued opening of outpatient clinics put physical therapy in the position of helping patients avoid surgery, avoid further functional loss, avoid visits to urgent care or emergency departments and decrease opioid use. We did all this without contributing negatively to the spread of the virus. For this, we should all be proud.

Here are the most current CDC Guidelines for:

One side effect of quarantine and "COVID days" has been the deep appreciation I feel to live in this amazing state. Physical distancing is easy and breathtaking at the same time. The spirit of our members and Board members hearten me daily in their hard work and spirit. This issue of the Big Dipper has contributions from many of our committed and talented members covering important topics including: reimbursement, membership, Centennial Scholar Program, legislative priorities and more.

You will read about TRICARE's Low Back Pain Demonstration Project rolling out for 2 years in 10 states. It is a program that waives physical therapy co-pays for patients who elect to go directly to physical therapy for their first 3 visits. This is our future. We can demonstrate our value and incentivize seeing us directly, saving use of drugs, imaging, surgery, procedures and chronic pain. This is an exciting opportunity for our profession to demonstrate positive outcomes. Every storm runs out of rain, eventually clouds clear. It is clear that we as a profession will have left a positive imprint on all those we help during this stressful time. It is with great pride and humility to thank you all for your work and help during this challenging year.

“See” you at the Fall Conference.

Alec Kay, PT, PT, DMT, Board-Certified Clinical Specialist in Orthopaedic Physical Therapy
President, APTA Alaska