

A Story to Tell

APTA Alaska describes a partnership between leadership and private practices

By Alec Kay, PT, DMT

APTA ALASKA HAS A STORY TO TELL. IT'S A STORY OF a successful partnership between chapter leadership and local private practices to provide a valuable community service. It's a story of giving and belief in our beautiful profession. We are providing physical therapy services to people with financial barriers to care. Their lives have been diminished and without our help would not otherwise be receiving crucial interventions.

From first joining the physical therapy community in Anchorage, Alaska, I have valued the strong commitment in the community toward accessibility for patients, regardless of their ability to pay. In 2020, we were "building the airplane as we piloted it" with the COVID pandemic. Supporting our membership and patients was exhausting and challenging.

PROVIDING OPTIMISM

APTA Alaska leadership did its best to act in positive ways and provide opportunities for optimism in the community. At the time, APTA President Sharon Dunn rallied the association to act, citing our history as an association born in adversity and coming through in times of need with action. We leaned on that national top-down leadership and embarked on a project that would meet our mission of providing valuable physical therapy services to our community. We wanted to improve lives by optimizing movement and decreasing pain. That was the impetus for creating a pro bono physical therapy for the state of Alaska.

The APTA community has great support and models for pro bono physical therapy care, and we initially relied heavily on that resource. There are phenomenal networks and teams, and we consulted with many. We struggled with finding partnership opportunities with local agencies and, as a result, created the novel concept of partnering with private practices to create our community clinic. This partnership allows for streamlined action and agility, a hallmark of private practice spirit, and minimizes bureaucratic burden on getting the clinic rolling.

We announced our intentions to our membership, which led to an interested and talented band of volunteers who all shared the quality of a generous heart. The formation of this six-person board was the beginning of the hard work and the fun.



This impressive team has my deepest respect and gratitude. With some community support and advice as well as philanthropic donations toward legal help, we created the Alaska Community Physical Therapy Clinic, a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation. This entity is separate from APTA Alaska, yet the bylaws tie it to the chapter in various ways; APTA Alaska provided the initial seed money.

TAKING CARE OF THE COMMUNITY

Step by step we checked the boxes and positioned ourselves to take care of community members with financial barriers to physical therapy. A local private practice agreed to donate space to host the clinic. So with APTA Alaska seed money, monetary donations and liability insurance, we marketed to the community. Next, we recruited volunteer physical therapists from all over the local community, including two from Fairbanks, to set up an online schedule and found caring people to manage the administrative aspects of the clinic.

We saw our first patients in December of 2022 and to this date have had more than 220 encounters with patients whose function and life experience are better because of the care



we provide. We now have a team of providers and administrative volunteers.

The goal has always been to scale this concept around the state and country. We are now open for helping Alaskans in Wasilla and in the process of creating a clinic in Homer, Alaska, as well. All it takes is a team that cares.

As a chapter, and as a Board, our deep belief in the pro bono clinic's value has propelled us through this endeavor. Ultimately, it has been as rewarding for our volunteers as it has for the patients we serve. Instead of burnout, they report "burn in" from the uplifting satisfaction of helping fellow Alaskans who have no path to PT. Additionally, it shines a bright positive light on our profession as a whole. Turning our efforts outward has generated new community recognition.

In a big way, this effort is a reminder of how moving forward in a time of challenge and adversity brings positive change. We would love to help any chapter establish similar clinics around the country; it's part of our mission. **I**

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