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**Lifelong Learning**

Graduation day is rapidly approaching. Although this day will mark the end of my learning career at the University of Jamestown Physical Therapy Program, this day brings forth the start of a new educational journey. Starting my career as a Physical Therapist, there are various avenues I could pursue to enhance myself as a young professional and guide my success of career goals. However, at this point in time, I'm uncertain of where I want my final destination to be. I believe this mindset is beneficial at this time in my career as there are endless possibilities; including some that I may not be aware of yet, or that may happen to occur by chance. Though I cannot be certain of exactly everything I want to accomplish in my career, I am certain that I will dedicate myself to lifelong learning, set and accomplish career goals to better serve my patients and myself, and strive to meet the APTA's core values every day that I practice.

Lifelong learning is especially important to me as I move forward with my career. To me, lifelong learning is the commitment that an individual makes to continue to better equip themselves for challenges. Lifelong learners strive to be the best version of themselves that they can. I want to be a therapist that continues to exponentially mature with each passing year to better serve my patients. So upon graduation, successfully passing the licensure exam, and starting a new job, I plan on seeking out learning opportunities immediately in subsequent years.

Understanding the means that I learn best, my first action in lifelong learning will be to establish a strong mentor-mentee relationship at my jobsite. Having a mentor would allow a deeper relationship to develop between you and your coworker. A mentor would also be an excellent resource at times that

I am questioning a patient case, am debating continuing education courses, or need insight for other reasons. I will aim to choose a mentor that is well-rounded, has been practicing for a few years, and has excellent patient rapport to help guide my journey to establish myself as a physical therapist.

Another action I will take to remain a lifelong learner will be to continue practicing evidence-based care. Currently, I know that I could better incorporate evidence-based knowledge into my patient care. Even with the numerous valuable articles I have acquired from professors, I still feel that I could improve upon utilizing all of the information that they present. This means that moving forward, I'm going to have to strictly dedicate time to research new, relevant, and appropriate articles that enable to adopt the concepts to potentially better serve my patients. I know this area of learning will not be easy for me in the future but I value the importance of this knowledge in my practice and it will be significant for my patient's outcomes; therefore, I will ensure that I dedicate time and resources into remaining evidence-based.

Continuing education credits (CEU) will also be important moving forward. I'm excited to explore the numerous ways that I can earn CEUs to improve my clinical skills, improve patient care, better serve my community, and guide new students within the profession. My CEU course choices will be dependent upon the setting that I get a job in; however, I plan to begin with more generalized courses that will be applicable to a wider range of patients before worrying about higher-level specialty courses. After a few years, I would like to become a clinical instructor (CI). I would prefer to wait a few years out as that would enable me to continue learning from my mentor and hone in my own skills. I feel as though it would be un-just for me to take on a student earlier than that. I would want to ensure that I would be able to give them a strong clinical rotation experience and be a high-quality CI that will help better shape the future of physical therapy.

Establishing career goals is pivotal in continuing your personal growth. Setting a target to strive for gives you a larger purpose. It keeps you engaged and motivated day after day. In five years my goal is to be working for the same company I was hired with initially, be working towards sitting for a specialty exam, and to be either a CI and/or the SCCE (site coordinator of clinical education). Between being a CI and the SCCE, I would prefer to be the SCCE of the clinical site as I enjoy organizing and scheduling and would most likely enjoy working with the various directors of clinical education (DCE) in placing their students. In order to achieve these goals, I need to formulate a plan.

To reach my goal of remaining at the same company for my first five years, I need to ensure that the job I accept is sincerely a good fit for both myself and the employer. I will be certain that it is a setting that I can see myself succeeding in. I will be sure that the site has an opportunity to connect with a mentor as that is extremely important to me. I plan to only take a position at a company where I agree with and believe in the company's vision and mission. Actions I can take to increase my worth at my work site include investing myself in the company and bringing forth innovative ideas to continue to better serve our patients. I will strive to provide patient care that goes above and beyond expectations to set high standards of practice for myself that reflect positively on the company I'm employed with.

To prepare to achieve my goal of sitting for a specialty exam, I will first establish a patient population that I thoroughly enjoy working with and with whom I want to become an expert in treating. After this decision, I will discuss my wishes with my employer to see how my educational goals will benefit the company, establish forms of reimbursement if applicable, and see if any accommodations may be made to promote a smooth process. I will then construct a study schedule that will be feasible to

follow through with based upon maintaining a full-time position and personal life. I will also be keeping track of my applicable patient contact hours to ensure I qualify and am qualified to sit for the exam.

To achieve my goal of being either a CI or SCCE, I plan to reach out to my rehabilitation manager during the latter half of my first year. At that time, I would be confident knowing the ins-and-outs of the company, would be experienced in the company's documentation and communication systems, would have built good relationships with my fellow coworkers, and would feel prepared to take on higher responsibilities than just my caseload. In there is not a need for filling either of these positions, I will get involved in other leadership opportunities either within the company or in the community to continue gathering skills to better equip myself for one of these responsibilities in the future.

The APTA recognizes seven core values that practicing physical therapist should demonstrate as professionals, including: accountability, altruism, compassion/caring, excellence, integrity, professional duty and social responsibility. Within my career, I intend on representing each of these values in my practice. I've constructed an idea or two on how I plan to demonstrate each value.

I will demonstrate accountability in my actions of lifelong learning and responsiveness to patient's goals and needs. As I've mentioned previously, I have a plan to hold myself responsible for continued learning to better my clinical knowledge and skills to better serve my patients. Pairing with that, I will hold myself accountable for ensuring I do everything in my power to aide patient's in achieving their personal goals and treating their needs to the best of my ability. Although this is a difficult item to measure, I can self-reflect upon my treatment planning and daily interactions. I have succeeded in this category if I can confidently say, "I provided the best care I could've to this patient within the time frame and resources. I am proud of my efforts."

I will demonstrate altruism, compassion, and caring through my patient interactions. To demonstrate these qualities, I will aim to provide services beyond that of what is expected. If a patient would benefit from an extra 5 or 10 minutes on top their scheduled treatment and I do not have other obligations I must attend to, I will remain with the patient. I will do all I can to advocate for my patient's needs, such as further imaging, other professional involvement, or equipment/devices that would benefit my patients. As always, I will aim to build a strong rapport with every patient I interact with by embracing their individual characteristics and doing everything I can for them to resume the highest level of function possible.

I will demonstrate excellence in my continual improvement and integration of evidence-based practice within my personal practice. With successful addition of research-based concepts in my clinical practice, I can provide more efficient and effective patient-care to elicit better outcomes and functional success for my patients. And for cases that I am unable to find pertinent research for or if I am frustrated because patient progress is not being made as I would expect, I believe it is important for me to maintain striving for professional excellence by using other available resources – such as my coworkers to draw in differing views, thought processes, and ideas to improve my clinical skills.

I will demonstrate integrity by abiding by all state rules, regulations, and applicable laws. I intend to adhere by the highest standards of physical therapy. I want to not just be a *fine* or *good* physical therapist; I want to be a *great* Physical Therapist. In working towards being *great*, I plan to demonstrate being trustworthy, compassionate, and patient-centered. But one important factor portraying integrity will be to recognize my personal and professional limits in patient care and appropriately referring when I am unable to provide optimal treatment.

I will demonstrate professional duty by committing to promote the physical therapy profession and its worth beyond the 40-hour work week. As Physical Therapists, we are experts in the human body, physical health, and overall wellness. Physical Therapists are the movement experts. I will strive to utilize this background knowledge to further promote full-body health and wellbeing to my patients, community members, and those close to me. We have a voice in breaking the poor habits of American societies today. I have strong feelings regarding this devastating truth and I want to be a participant in the change.

I will demonstrate social responsibility by continuing to be a volunteering community member. Although I do not have current ties in volunteering within the physical therapy realm, I believe that giving back to the community in whichever organization you feel strong about its mission is important to build rapport within a different population that you may not typically interact with. This provides a great possibility to reach out to community members who may be unaware of the possibilities in physical therapy services.

As discussed within this paper, although my schooling career will be coming to a close I will be continuing to learn throughout my lifetime. I aspire to continue furthering my education to better serve my patients and community members. Utilizing this rough guideline to reach my career goals will help keep me on track to have longevity at my worksite, sit for a specialty exam, and serve as a CI or SCCE. And in striving to demonstrate the APTA core values, I can be confident that I am providing the most optimal patient care that I can. I'm thrilled to see where lifelong learning will take.