

Current Issue Home

November 26, 2007

[e-mail this page](#) 

[Printer Friendly Version](#)

## Physical therapy lab provides helping hands to students and patients

For Sacramento State physical therapy professor Michael McKeough, knowing is not the same as doing, so for eight days each semester his students leave the books behind and receive hands-on training in patient care.

The students participate in a mock clinic treating real patients with neurological problems like stroke, multiple sclerosis, traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury and Parkinson's disease.

"In many programs, physical therapy students practice on each other," McKeough says "Well, that is completely unrealistic for what they will find in the real world. It is absolutely unreasonable for a normal, healthy student to feign the difficulties of a patient who has had a stroke. They just can't do it. There are neurological changes that a healthy person just cannot duplicate."



Evelyn Jones, left, is put through her paces with an assist from student Sarah Montgomery.

Fifteen patients, selected with the help of support groups, come to Sacramento State's College of Health and Human Services for a one-hour physical therapy session eight Fridays during the semester.

"Most of the patients live at home but are having some kind of functional deficit such as walking, getting in and out of bed or endurance issues," McKeough says. "Most have also run out of insurance coverage, and this allows them to continue to receive treatment."

"This has been great," says Teresa Cerles, a multiple sclerosis patient at the mock clinic. "I received exercises before from a tai chi instructor, but in this context, it is clearer to me. These students are very good, and so far it has helped."

McKeough brought the program to the campus when he arrived here in 2006. He modeled it on programs he developed while teaching at Shenandoah University in Virginia and the Medical College of Georgia.

"The program is a win-win for all parties," McKeough says "We give patients a place to come and get free care to do better in their functional activities, the students learn by having a real person to be involved with, and the university does incredible community service. It's as beneficial a program as you can imagine."

The sessions are the lab portion of McKeough's Physical Therapy Neurologic Evaluation and Treatment course. Two students work with patients giving them a variety of exercises to strengthen

muscles, techniques to increase mobility and encouragement to fight through the sometimes painful rehabilitation process.

"The students are tolerable," says B.J. Hobday, a multiple sclerosis patient who laughed as she struggled to form the words. "Actually, they are good to be working with. They give you what you may not always receive in a professional setting. You get the sense of the student wanting to know and focusing their attention on the benefits for the patient."

"Sometimes the progress is slow, but it is really satisfying when the patients come back, and there is definitely improvement in their daily life," says Japna Bakhshi, physical therapy student. "Every time I see something good happening for the patient it makes my day."

While the focus is on patient care, students learn more than just how to deal with physical issues. "This has really made a world of difference for us because we're learning how to interact with patients, how to be social and what ethical issues we may have to deal with. There are not too many programs where you get exposure like that," says Atel Aitali, physical therapy student.

"What's nice about this program is it correlates with what the students are learning," says Jack Corbert, a physical therapist at UC Davis Hospital who comes to campus to instruct in the mock clinic. "It's not theory; it's applying what they have been taught in class. When they graduate, they will be very strong, entry-level physical therapists".

For more information on the physical therapy program, call McKeough at 278-5055.

**About the writer:**

Sacramento State's Mike Ward can be reached at [mward@csus.edu](mailto:mward@csus.edu)