

**Request for Authorization to Plan a
Doctor of Physical Therapy at
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**

Introduction

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill requests authorization to plan a Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) program (51.2308). The UNC Graduate Council recommended approval of this request at its meeting in April 2002.

Program Description

The proposed program will be a post-professional degree designed for students who have Master's of Physical Therapy (MPT) degrees. The American Physical Therapy Association has endorsed the Doctor of Physical Therapy as the preferred professional degree for students entering the practice of physical therapy. The 2000 US News & World Report ranked the UNC Chapel Hill Physical Therapy program as number 3, along with 5 other institutions. Ten of the top 18 programs offer the DPT and 6 are seeking approval. The request to offer the DPT is consistent with trends in nationally ranked programs. UNCCH also seeks to offers students access to appropriate training and credentials that will enable graduates to compete in an evolving market and more importantly, to assume positions of leadership within in the field in order to guide policy change and mentor novice clinicians.

The Division of Physical Therapy in the School of Allied Health at the UNCCH has designed a program that will maintain the MPT program intact until developments in the profession or the market drives the transition of the DPT as the required entry level degree. The program will enroll experienced physical therapy clinicians who seek advanced clinical knowledge and skills. UNC-CH already offers an interdisciplinary Ph.D. in Human Movement Science for students who want to prepare for academic research careers. The new program is designed for students interested in a clinical doctorate and it will be housed in the Department of Allied Health in the UNCCH School of Medicine. Clinical and first professional doctorates emphasize the development of clinical competence rather than advanced training in research and a doctoral dissertation. As a clinical doctorate, students in the new program will be required to apply knowledge as they develop the skills necessary to become advanced and autonomous practicing professionals. All students will be required to complete a doctoral project and prepare a paper for professional dissemination.

Changes in the delivery of physical therapy services and the expansion of non-traditional practices settings have placed growing demands on educational programs to prepare graduates who are ready for the challenges of autonomous practices. The practice expectations for new graduates have risen considerably as have changes in the delivery of health care services. Expertise, knowledge, and skills previously acquired by therapists through years of self-study, continuing education, and clinical experiences

following graduation are now expected of new graduates. The growing emphasis on evidence-based practice also places a burden on educational programs to prepare graduates who are skilled consumers of the research literature and adept at synthesizing new information from a variety of sources to make clinical decisions that will result in optimal, cost effective outcomes of care.

Program Need

There are entry-level DPT programs in North Carolina at Duke University and Elon College. UNC has MPT programs at ECU, UNCCH, WCU and WSSU. The UNCCH program is designed to be the first program within UNC and the program will be designed so that graduates from the other UNC MPT programs can easily articulate into the UNCCH DPT program. Many of the courses will be offered online so that practicing physical therapist throughout the state can upgrade their knowledge and skills also. Distance learning students will be required to attend periodic on-campus seminars and the Division of Physical Therapy faculty will arrange for mentored clinical experiences for distance learning students. Faculty in the department mailed surveys to 977 practicing physical therapists and a second survey to 519 physical therapists in NC. The response rate for the first survey was 38% and 25% indicated an interest in enrolling in the program. The program expects to enroll 25 full-time students and 5 part-time students.

Resources

The proposed program will be funded using internal reallocations, external grant funds and funds generated through increased enrollment.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Governors Committee on Educational Planning, Policies and Programs approve the request for authorization to plan a Doctor of Physical Therapy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, effective May 2002.