

Clinicians Bring Medical Residency Model to Physical Therapy at Shepherd Center

Last summer, a dynamic, new partnership began – The Mercer University-Shepherd Center Residency in Neurologic Physical Therapy.

In the long-term, this partnership means Shepherd Center will host Mercer physical therapy (PT) residents for 13-month stints designed to broaden their understanding of treating patients with neurologic dysfunction.

For now, it means Shepherd Center is benefiting from the presence of Sarah Caston, the first neurologic PT resident in Georgia.

“Sarah has been a great addition,” says Shepherd Center’s Lauren Greenfeld, DPT, who developed the residency program with a team of physical therapy educators and managers from Mercer University and Shepherd Center. “Sarah has generated excitement about this program, advancing neurologic practice and the potential for expansion to multiple physical therapy residents.”

Caston has evaluated and managed patients with spinal cord injuries under the mentorship of Shepherd Center clinicians. She has also taken her knowledge back to the Mercer University campus. This past winter, she taught spinal cord injury modules and assisted with related examinations at Mercer.

“I feel very grateful to be here at Shepherd and have this unique opportunity,” Caston says. “It is challenging, humbling and one of the most worthwhile experiences I believe I will ever have in my career as a physical therapist.”

Caston’s work started under the tutelage of Corrie Abegglen, a PT in Shepherd Center’s Spinal Cord Injury Program. “Sarah is very driven, and it has been a nice challenge to assist with higher-level learning,” Abegglen says.

“This residency program is a great opportunity to develop advanced-practice clinicians here at Shepherd and for the healthcare community,” Greenfeld says. “When Sarah completes her 13-month residency, she will have the unique ability to serve as a physical therapist in any specialty area at Shepherd (brain injury, spinal cord injury and multiple sclerosis) across all continuums of care (ICU, inpatient rehabilitation and post-acute care). The clinical experience and professional growth is similar to the model for physician residencies.

“Most importantly, this program aligns with two of Shepherd Center’s strategic priorities for creating the best outcomes for patients and families,” Greenfeld adds.

Special thanks go to Joe Donnelly and Leslie Taylor of Mercer University and Sarah Morrison, Rebecca Dail, Diane Johnston, Shari McDowell and Lauren Greenfeld at Shepherd for their efforts in designing the program.

– Phillip Jordan