



president's *perspective*

Exploring the Ontario Internationally Educated Physical Therapy Bridging (OIEPB) Program

Maggie Donohue, PT

In November 2012, two of our board of directors, Nancy Kirsch and David Relling, along with staff members Mark Lane and Sue Lindeblad, visited the University of Toronto in Ontario, Canada to find out more about the Bridging Program. Sue represented the Foreign Credentialing Commission on Physical Therapy. They were accompanied by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education, (CAPTE) chair, Martha Hinman and staff member, Ellen Price.

The Bridging Program was first discussed by Federation folks at the Federation's Leadership Issues Forum in Alexandria, Virginia August 2012 while reviewing issues regarding the regulation of foreign-educated PTs.

As reported on the University of Toronto's website,

"The goal of the [Ontario Internationally Educated Physical Therapy Bridging \(OIEPB\) Program](#) is to help Internationally Educated Physical Therapists (IEPTs) gain registration to practice physical therapy in Ontario. The OIEPB program is intended for experienced international physical therapists who are currently residing in Ontario.

"The Bridging Program is designed to provide educational opportunities for physical therapists educated outside of Canada, who already possess specified qualifications, to develop the additional knowledge, skills and clinical reasoning required to meet Canadian entry-to-practice standards. The Bridging Program provides cultural and workplace orientation to facilitate success in the workplace."

As we look into ways to ensure that the foreign educated are ready to practice in the US, we thought this program warranted a closer look.

Historical background

The impetus for the program came from the Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators, the Canadian federal government and the Ontario provincial government.

The program was first piloted at Ryerson University, a non-medical school which had developed bridging programs for lawyers, engineers and several other non-medical groups.

The pilot did not have the success rate the government wanted; those with lower English-language TOEFL scores did not do as well in the pilot. It was determined the program needed to be within a physical therapy school and was moved to the University of Toronto.

Bridging Program overview

The Bridging Program is a nine-month program that started in May 2012. Courses run from May to September and from October to January. Participants meet two days a week. Clinicals are in September and January. The program is viewed as continuing education so students do not get a transcript. It costs \$6,000 with the eligibility of a \$5,000 scholarship from the government.

Entry requirements

- Reside in Ontario
- Attain a TOEFL score of 92 (raised from 88 after the Ryerson experience)
- Referred by the Alliance or eligible for the Canadian exam
- One day assessment to include the following tests:
 - Multiple choice test
 - OSCE – the Objectively Structured Clinical Exam (to assess basic PT skills)
 - MMI (multiple mini interviews) covering ethics, etc.
 - Video of a case conference; must summarize findings and make PT Care Plan

Twenty six people applied for the Bridging Program; 22 made it to the Assessment and 16 were accepted.

Curriculum

The curriculum was mapped against the core competencies established by the profession and the most common gaps identified by the Alliance. It is not an entry program but an “enhancement” program. It is geared for people that just need a “brush-up.” Each participant is assigned a mentor.

The first half is more basic and the second half more complex. There is a five-day “boot camp” the first week. Based on the one-day assessment, there is some individualization within the courses for individuals. The basic curriculum is same for all attendees, however.

The curriculum is case based. It uses multiple choice tests as much as possible to familiarize students with the format. There are two clinical experiences; hospitals and acute care settings are used as much as possible; the experiences are scheduled when the PT program is not doing their clinicals.

“Physical Therapy in the Canadian Health Care Context”

This is the first nine-week, online modular component completed. It is facilitated by instructors and costs \$475. Other modular components are being developed. Topics include the following.

- Cultural competence
- Client-centered care
- Determinants of health and health promotion
- The role of the federal and provincial government in healthcare
- Regulations and scope of practice
- The continuum of care: Where PTs work
- Teams and the use of support personnel
- Roles of the physical therapist, lifelong learning and job search strategies
- Review, evaluation and feedback

Additional module courses

Additional modules that are being developed include systems reviews (musculoskeletal and cardio-respiratory) and research, which is being developed by the University of Alberta.

They are also developing three courses that will include two weeks of online curriculum followed by Saturday face-to-face labs and a six-week clinical. These courses will provide a transcript.

How do we move forward in the US?

We think the Bridging Program is worth pursuing in the US. We are considering establishing a planning group that would include representatives from FSBPT, CAPTE, FCCPT and possibly APTA, the Academic Council of the APTA (ACAPTA) and the Education Section of the APTA.

The biggest obstacle would seem to be finding funding for the program.

Additionally, there would need to be some sort of transcript or degree so that those who successfully complete the program could be found to be substantially equivalent to a US graduate.

While there are some advanced Masters of Physical Therapy as well as other programs in the United States whose enrollees are foreign educated, most do not augment both the clinical and didactic skills to meet regulatory requirements as the University of Toronto program does.

The staff at FSBPT is in the process of collecting more information about US programs that are accepting foreign-educated physical therapists to their advanced degree programs.

If your physical therapist program does focus on providing courses designed to assist foreign-educated physical therapists, the Federation would love to hear from you. Please contact us at communications@fsbpt.org.

President Maggie Donohue, PT served as President of the New Hampshire Board of Allied Health Professionals from 1998-2006. Maggie has served as a Federation Delegate as well as a member and chair of the Ethics and Legislation Committee.

Maggie's general background includes a history of participation in several organizations including: APTA member: 1984-present; member, committee to create legislation for an independent PT board in New Hampshire; liaison for PT governing board and NHAPTA government affairs committee; liaison, private practice organization and insurers in New Hampshire; presenter for FSBPT, APTA and NHAPTA.