Improving School-based PT Services for Our High School Students
with Toni Doty, PT, PhD, PCS

Transition to Adulthood is one of the most challenging aspects of providing school-based PT. Do you ever ask yourself why is it that we see a continual trend to decrease or discontinue PT services as students move into middle and high school? Many times we are not even providing services to HS students when teams discover that our services may be critical.

Luckily, long gone are the days when we say “well they are functional at school in the HS environment so we can discontinue PT services.” We must be proactive in our service approaches when the evidence tells us that although adolescents with disabilities, such as CP, may not change their motor ability, PT may be needed to provide ongoing supports for education and adult living. In addition, adults with disabilities tell us that 3 major barriers to independence are toileting, technology and transportation which are areas addressed by PT interventions. Our guide to PT practice and the ICF support our involvement with HS students but sometimes it is difficult to know where to begin. As with all of our students we begin with a thorough evaluation and active involvement in the IEP which includes the transition plan.

A national survey completed on the population of 1,229 school-based therapists found PTs working in secondary transition need to: (a) complete more comprehensive evaluations with students who have intensive support needs across a variety of future environments; and (b) expand collaborative service delivery beyond school environment to include a student’s local community and provide interventions in the community to promote generalizability of skills. Administrative support and in-service training are the strongest predictors of therapist involvement with transition-age students. Education in physical therapy, years of experience in school-based practice, and school-based practice with secondary age students were weak predictors of therapist involvement with transition-age students.

All of our students will transition at age 21! My hope is that we as PTs are instrumental team members who provide quality services that promote their inclusion in the community rather than sitting at home and watching TV. So have a great school year and make a pledge to go out into the community with your HS students OR decide on 1 concrete activity which you can implement in order to assist your local teams with transition of your secondary students!


Assessment Tool for High School Students
with Toni Doty, PT, PhD, PCS

Evaluation of our HS students must occur in specific and relevant environments (present and future). It is driven by student needs and preferences and while we may assess traditional mobility areas, with secondary students we must reframe our thinking and apply all findings across the ICF in order to address participation in 3 main transition areas: (1) Employment and postsecondary education; (2) Independent living, and; (3) Community participation.

Because it is quite apparent that students with significant disabilities will qualify for special education, many teams choose to complete a records review only. I urge you to consider using the Enderle-Severson Transition Rating Scale (ESTR). The most current version, the ESTR III, includes skills assessing the 3 transition areas listed above. It also has an optional Behavioral scale. The ESTR is criterion-referenced, user-friendly and beneficial for transition planning.

The cost is approximately $50.00, which includes a transition manual. For most students with whom we work, we would order the Peach form which is designed for students with intensive support needs. I typically use this with my high school teams and then determine if there are certain skill areas for which I can use ecological assessments to further break down skills into steps. This tool warrants a further look due to the price, utility, and also newer web-based versions. Happy Evaluating!
Predictors of Postsecondary Outcomes

Wouldn’t it be great if we knew what interventions, skills, experiences and attitudes can spell success for our HS students? Luckily, Test, et al (2009) and Mazzotti, et al (2016) conducted systematic reviews that found 18 moderate and potential predictors for postsecondary education, employment and independent living. Here is the full list: Career awareness, Interagency collaboration, Occupational course, Social skills, Self-determination/self-advocacy skills, Vocational education, Transition program, Parent expectations, Inclusion in general education, Paid employment/work experience, Self-care/independent living skills, Student support, Travel skills, Community experiences, Exit exam requirements/HS diploma status, Parental involvement, Program of study, and Work study.

Review the list and see where you can make a big impact. You can focus on travel skills, whether it’s taking a bus, using a car service via an app, or hailing a cab. Join students in their work programs to assess & improve their work skills, and teach them to problem solve and advocate for their adaptive needs. Take therapy out of the PT room or closet and develop independent living skills. Improve ROM & strength by reaching for groceries, balance during hygiene activities, increase endurance by walking or wheeling to the post office, or practice transfers in the restroom. Being able to use the office restroom is a big deal!

Participate in transition planning and encourage the team to use evidence-based self-determination tools such as Self-determined Learning Model of Instruction and Whose Future Is It Anyway? Finally, apply your knowledge of the student’s health condition to brainstorm with the team supports that can be provided so the student can attend general education full-time or part-time.

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Your SIG Leadership Team

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Questions, concerns or ideas? Email the board at pediatricschoolsig@gmail.com

Meet Your School-based SIG Team

Are you planning to attend APPTAC in November? The conference would be a great time to meet your School-based SIG leaders. Watch out for an email containing information regarding planned School SIG networking opportunities at APPTAC that we hope you will be able to join. We’ll kick off the getting-to-know our SIG team by introducing our SIG Vice Chair and ACCESS Newsletter Team Member.

Sharon Antoszyk, PT, DPT, PCS is the lead PT for Cabarrus County Schools in Concord NC. Dr. Antoszyk received her BSPT from East Carolina University in 1985 and her transitional DPT from University of Tennessee at Chattanooga in 2011. She has over 30 years of experience as a PT and over 25 in the school setting. Dr. Antoszyk has participated in several workgroups and committees and chaired the workgroup on Dosage Considerations. Currently, Dr. Antoszyk is the vice chair of the School SIG. Sharon enjoys helping children reach their fullest potential.