

EXERCISE in EDUCATION

UNM Division of Physical Therapy Gains New Orthopaedic Residency Program By Amanda Gardner

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When Jimmy Minner, PT, DPT, SCS, a 2010 graduate of UNM's physical therapy doctoral program, decided to pursue a post-graduate residency, he had to relocate 1,500 miles away to fulfill his dream. At the time, there were simply no physical therapy residency programs in New Mexico.

“I was definitely surprised how few programs there were, even in the Western region,” says Minner, who completed his residency in South Carolina and is now one of three sport-certified specialists at Langford Physical Therapy in Albuquerque.

Minner was the first of fewer than 10 UNM program graduates to pursue specialist residencies, each of whom had to go out of state.

All that changes this year with the introduction of a new UNM Orthopaedic Physical Therapy Residency Program, the first in New Mexico.

“This allows our students who are home-grown to stay here and be specialists,” says Adam Walsh, PT, DPT, an assistant professor in UNM's Division of Physical Therapy and program coordinator of the new residency program.

It has been a dream almost two decades in the making for Beth Moody Jones, PT, DPT, EdD, associate professor and division chief. The goal, she says, is not only to train more specialists in a state that desperately needs them, but also to nurture more clinical instructors who can in turn train more physical therapists.

“There hasn't been a pathway to mentor up-and-coming faculty,” Jones says, adding that Minner will serve as one such mentor in the new program.

The Orthopaedic Physical Therapy Residency Program selected three participants for the residency's first year. Each will be assigned to one of three local clinics: Langford, ATI Physical Therapy or Armada Physical Therapy.

The residency is currently a candidate program and, if all goes well, will gain accreditation in June 2021, says Walsh, who is also a board-certified sports clinical specialist.

The division hopes to add more residencies in the future, which means more specialists in the pipeline. “The idea is that this will run smoothly and will expand,” Walsh says. “Neurology would be the place to go first, then potentially sports, maybe pediatrics. They are desperately needed in New Mexico.”

With the new program in place, UNM joins a growing nationwide trend. While residencies in the field began in the late 1990s, “the number has exploded in the past six to eight years,” Walsh says.

New Mexico lags not only in number of residencies, but also in number of both generalist and specialist physical therapists, a shortage the new residency program hopes to address. New Mexico has only 3.67 physical therapists for every 10,000 population, versus 6.5 for the nation, according to a 2018 article in the *Journal of Physiotherapy*. That gives it one of the lowest physical therapist-to-population ratios in the country, Jones says.

More physical therapists would also help address the acute dearth of primary care physicians in the state.

“We are an access point,” Jones says. “We do differential diagnosis. We can get people to other types of care.” And physical therapy has proven to be more effective at treating pain than opioid painkillers, whose abuse has become a national public health concern.

The residency program will benefit students as well. Minner says he not only gained knowledge, skills and confidence through his residency, he also boosted his earnings and gained more of a leadership position in his field.

Would he have stayed in New Mexico had an appropriate residency been available?

“I was born and raised here and I love it here,” says Minner, who was a javelin thrower as a UNM undergraduate and now plays competitive doubles sand volleyball. “I think if I would have had an option closer to home I probably would have stayed.”