



The Role of Occupational Therapy in Perinatal Pelvic Health and Wellness



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Description of the Doctoral Capstone Experience (DCE)

Occupational therapists are ideally-suited to address the physical and psychosocial impact of pelvic floor dysfunction (PFD), along with its inevitable effect on occupational participation and performance. This DCE will explore and advocate for the role of occupational therapy (OT) in perinatal pelvic health and wellness,

DCE Sites and Needs Assessment

This DCE involved a dual-site arrangement with cross-disciplinary mentorship from an occupational therapist and physical therapist.

Primary Site: The Woman's Well, Torrance, CA

The Woman's Well is a community and home-based private practice that provides birth education, pelvic health rehabilitation, doula support, and wellness services for the perinatal population. Needs include program development, patient education resources, marketing, and advocacy to promote the role of OT in maternal health.

Secondary Site: Providence Holy Cross Medical Center (PHCMC), Mission Hills, CA

PHCMC is non-for-profit facility with both inpatient and outpatient health services, including a cancer center, heart center, orthopedics unit, neuroscience and rehabilitation department, and a Level II Trauma Center. Needs include improved perinatal transitional care management and advocacy for the role of therapy services in maternal health.

Literature Review

PFD- Prevalent and Preventable

- Pregnancy and parity place women at increased risk for developing PFD (Wu et al., 2014).
- Despite effectiveness of conservative treatments for PFD, only 10-20% of symptomatic women seek help (Doaee et al., 2014) and often only after significant delay (Adelowo et al., 2014).

A Need for Integrated, Holistic Maternal Healthcare

- Women report psychological trauma associated with PFD due to lack of preparation and pelvic health education during pregnancy and postpartum (Skinner et al., 2018).
- Women desire improved body literacy, increased pelvic health education, and access to family-centered support services (Verbiest et al., 2018).

A Well-Equipped Profession with Ill-Developed Representation

- Although pelvic health is within the scope of OT practice (AOTA, 2020), there is a significant gap in peer-reviewed publications demonstrating the role of OT in pelvic health and maternal wellness.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the DCE, the doctoral student will:

1. Develop advanced clinical knowledge and skills in women's pelvic health services
2. Develop a comprehensive resource guide for patients and practitioners to promote pelvic health, maternal wellness, and transitional care management of the perinatal population at PHCMC
3. Contribute to the body of scholarly literature promoting the role of OT in perinatal pelvic health and maternal wellness

Project Implementation



Figure 1. Student participates in advanced pelvic health coursework

Advanced Clinical Practice Skills

The student developed advanced clinical knowledge and skills in the evaluation and treatment of pelvic health conditions through continuing education coursework, direct patient care, and mentorship from DCE site mentors. Employing an OT lens, the student then applied this clinical knowledge during research implementation and program development at the primary and secondary sites, respectively.

Program Development at PHCMC

After establishing the needs of various departments servicing the perinatal population at PHCMC, the student created a holistic resource guide to enhance collaboration across disciplines and settings. The guide featured eight sections: 1) Patient Education on Common Conditions and Procedures; 2) Pelvic Health, ADLs, and Transition of Care; 3) Therapy Management for Women on Bed Rest; 4) Bowel and Bladder Health; 5) Mental Health, Wellness, and Community Resources; 6) Sexual Health; 7) Breastfeeding; and 8) Outcome Measures. The guide was introduced during a culminating in-service that promoted holistic perinatal education and improved transitional care management.

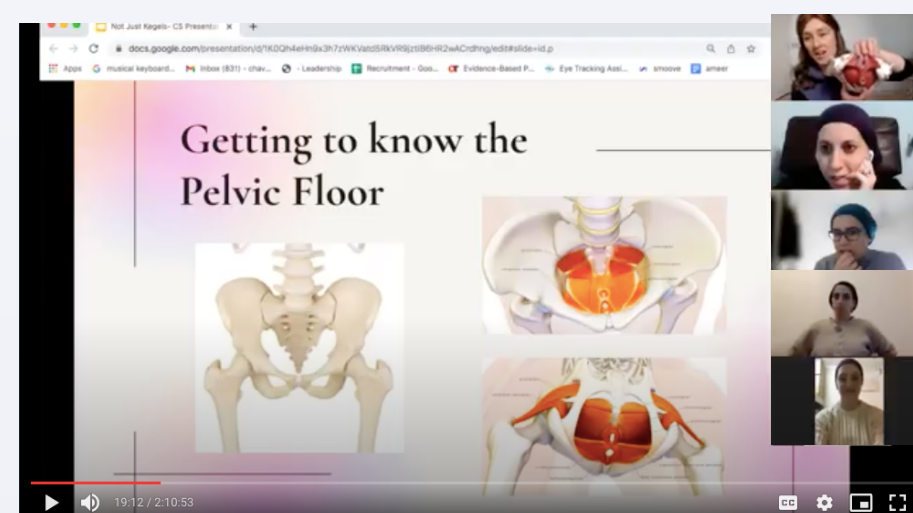


Figure 2. Student facilitates pelvic health workshop for pregnant women on Zoom

Research with The Woman's Well

Research sought to explore the following question: "What is the impact of pelvic health education and training on birth outcomes among primiparous women who deliver in hospital-based settings?" The student assisted the research team in refining the study design, developing participant resources, recruitment, facilitating group interventions, and compiling a research draft in preparation for publication.

Project Outcomes

Advanced Clinical Practice and Program Development Focus Areas

The culminating perinatal resource guide and in-service brought together staff from three departments and initiated conversations with the PHCMC Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology regarding perinatal transitional care management. The in-service survey indicated that the overwhelming majority of participants strongly agreed that the presentation contributed to their increased understanding of PFD and transitional care management for the perinatal population. In addition, participants found the resource guide to be user-friendly and applicable to their practice.

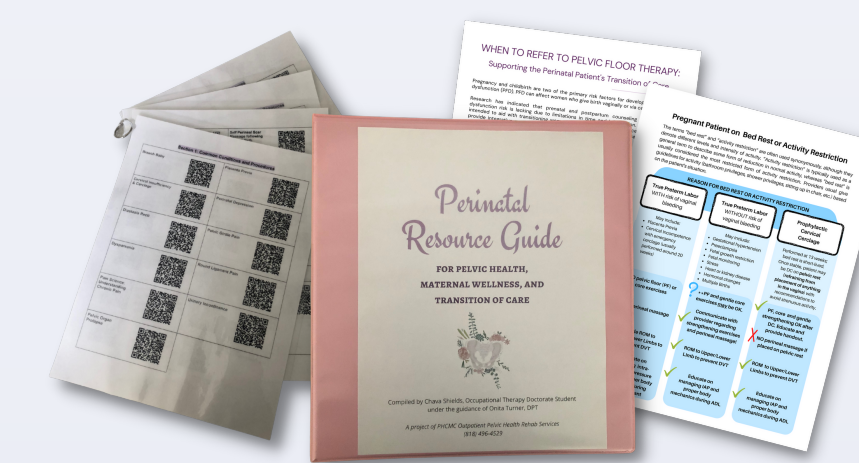


Figure 3. Perinatal Resource Guide with 70+ resources, quick response codes for accessibility, and laminated reference sheets for transitional care management.

Research Focus Area

Research implementation served as a channel for OT professional advocacy. Through recruitment, networking with local women's health providers, and intervention facilitation, the research team was able to promote awareness of OT's role in perinatal health.

Participants in the intervention group indicated high satisfaction with class content and presenter expertise, increased empowerment and confidence with the birth process, improved body literacy, and a greater understanding of pelvic health.



Figure 4. Participant feedback following the pelvic health education and training intervention



Figure 5. QR code to access Perinatal Resource Guide For Pelvic Health, Maternal Wellness, and Transition of Care

Scholarly Deliverables

- A perinatal resource guide for patients and staff
- An in-service discussing perinatal pelvic health and introducing the resource guide to enhance collaboration in maternal care
- The Introduction, Literature Review, and Method sections of the research paper evaluating birth outcomes following a pelvic health class

Evaluation

Project outcomes were evaluated in four ways:

- A competency checklist completed by site mentors —Amanda Littlejohn and Onita Turner— to assess the student's professional behavior and pelvic health clinical skills obtained by the end of the DCE
- Survey data collected from PHCMC in-service participants to assess the perceived value, organization and clarity of the presentation and Perinatal Resource Guide
- An academic rubric completed by the research team —Amanda Littlejohn, Sujata Martin, and Kathryn Duke—to assess the scholarly nature of the Introduction, Literature Review, and Method sections of the research draft
- Survey data collected from research intervention participants to assess satisfaction with the prenatal pelvic health workshop.

Detailed project outcomes available upon request.

Implications for OT Practice

- OTs are holistic healthcare providers who are ideally-suited to address the physical, emotional, and psychosocial needs of the perinatal population.
- Given advanced training and mentorship, OTs may thrive as perinatal pelvic health and wellness specialists.
- Due to the profession's broad scope of practice and training, OTs can contribute to enhanced collaboration among providers and therapists servicing the perinatal population.

Conclusion

Opportunities for OT in perinatal pelvic health and wellness have significantly improved in the last decade. However, advocacy efforts are necessary to continue elevating the voice of OT in this niche practice area, as research and support resources are predominantly driven by allied PT providers. Through interprofessional collaboration at PHCMC and research implementation with The Woman's Well, the student promoted the role of OT in women's health topics among both practitioners and perinatal women in the U.S. and English-speaking communities in Israel.

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References Available Upon Request