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## A CASE STUDY

## Physical Therapy Being the Body of Christ: "Service is joy"

By Carrie Abraham and Mark Drnach

he fulfillment of the Jesuit mission in physical therapy goes on in the work of health care providers at Wheeling, throughout the country, and the world.

The art and science of health has historically been supported and provided by people with religious and altruistic personalities. In today's society, shaping, individuals to fulfill this on-going need requires a graduate education that not only provides the information that makes a person competent but also fosters the compassionate and caring aspects of health care delivery.

In addition, the current concerns over costs and the accessibility of health services makes the delivery of services more challenging as it comes under the scrutiny of other vested parties such as third party payers, politicians, social activists, and consumers. The responsibility of educating graduate students for a health care profession while encouraging them to develop the attitude of "being a servant to others" is a growing challenge. Students today must have an understanding of factors beyond the basic sciences — including health care delivery systems, environmental scanning, resource allocation, break-even and cost-effectiveness analysis, to name a few. They must complete educational programs with more medical knowledge and more polished affective skills. They must be more compassionate and caring as they interact with an increasingly diverse patient population.

One aspect of professional educa-

tion curricula that attempts to foster a servant attitude is the incorporation of service learning. These experiences can be with another person, group, or community agency that exposes the student to a variety of programs and people of various cultures and socioe-conomic backgrounds, providing a benefit to the student, the educational program and the community partner.

Wheeling Jesuit University (WJU) is home to a Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) program embraces the Jesuit tradition of educational excellence and service. The program follows a unique problembased curriculum in the preparation of physical therapists for ethical leadership and public service in areas underserved by the health care system in the Appalachian region. The international aspect takes students to Mexico — including a school for children with disabilities, a homeless shelter, nursing home, and children's hospital. This is a chance to engage in service learning experiences at a local, regional, and international level in contact with people from various backgrounds, exposing them to the inconsistency of the availability of basic health care and public services. They are also guided to reflect on their responsibility as a health care provider for the weak and poor.

Theological reflections are important. They deepen the student's perception of the experience as he or she explores the change in the receiver as well as the supplier of the help.

They also develop interpersonal and advocacy skills. At WJU a recent

qualitative and quantitative analysis showed a statistically significant difference over time in clinical performance items related to assessing the quality of health care service delivery, education of others, professional growth, commitment to lifelong learning and understanding of the economic factors in the delivery of physical therapy services for students who participated in an international service learning opportunity versus those students who had not.

Students in the program scored higher on the subsets of the Civic Attitude and Skills Questionnaire in the area of civic action, interpersonal and problem solving skills, diversity attitudes, modern racism, social justice, value, and social desirability in post festing compared to pre-test results. The conclusions from this data are that graduate students who participated in service learning experiences are more likely to want to become actively involved in community activities, have increased tolerance toward people of diverse backgrounds and place a higher value on service learning courses.

One recent graduate student said, "It made me a more compassionate person and I brought that compassion home with me." In the words of Rabindranath Tagore, "I served and understood that service was joy."

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