

Raising the Intensity

The unique role of intensive therapy evolves

11.07.06

Intensive physical therapy, traditionally an eastern European concept, is now defined by many hours of therapy lasting for a three-week duration. It includes strengthening and repetitive movement to bridge the connection between brain and functional muscle movement, according to the American Association of Intensive Pediatric Physical Therapy (AAIPPT).

"The amount of hours and the unique European equipment, like the Universal Exercise Unit, play a huge role in the success of the program," states the AAIPPT's Web site, www.aaippt.org.

Intensive physical therapy was brought to the U.S. in 1999 to Euro-Pēds, a Pontiac, Mich.-based clinic out of North Oakland Medical Centers hospital. Children with cerebral palsy or other neuromuscular disorders receive up to 20 hours a week of NDT, SI, PNF, ROM, partial weight-bearing exercises and other techniques with the goal of creating new functional skills. The duration of the sessions also builds the strength to carry out their newly-learned skills.

Specialized European-based intensive therapy tools, such as a compression suit, often termed "suit therapy," and the Universal Exercise Unit (UEU), are often used in an intensive therapy setting because the therapists have the extra time and the additional training to use them.

With this extra time, intensive PTs naturally find their role involving collaboration and communication with pediatric orthotists, school therapists, occupational therapists, physiatrists, pediatricians and other specialists to ensure that the child leaves for home as equipped as possible to maintain their new skills they developed during their intensive sessions.



Bill Kunst, a pediatric orthotist, discusses appropriate bracing for a Euro-Peds patient with intensive physical therapist, Melissa McGinnis, PT, MPT. (Courtesy: Euro-Peds)



Angela Jackson, PT, MPT, an intensive physical therapist at Euro-Peds, and Brett, a suit therapy patient with cerebral palsy, take a break from therapy. (Courtesy: Euro-Peds)

"With six to 20 hours per week working with one child, an intensive physical therapist can really understand the abilities and special needs of their patient," says Angela Jackson, PT, MPT, an intensive pediatric physical therapist at Euro-Pēds.

As the role of this specialized field evolves in the United States, parents and other care providers are finding that the extra clinical time also means more time for education and exchange of information

between parents and therapists.

"I think of our role as almost like a Care Coordinator," Jackson explains. "Other than administering therapy to the child, our big role is determining what resources are appropriate for each child."

At the same time, intensive PTs have up to 20 hours per week to communicate with parents and caregivers who are often observing or involved in the child's therapy. "We see patients from all over the country, so we end up talking to parents and therapists to get ideas of new products and services that may help other patients," says Jackson, who has worked at Euro-Pēds for four years.

Therapists at Euro-Pēds routinely create a customized home exercise program (HEP) for each child at the end of the intensive therapy session. This step-by-step guide features photos of the child during therapy and is explained to the parents upon the patient's discharge. The HEP helps to communicate the child's abilities and goals to their outpatient and school therapists, as well as caregivers once the patient leaves Euro-Pēds and is in their day-to-day environment again.

Pediatric orthotists can be seen several times per week evaluating the needs of children from out of state. Upon the first day's evaluation process, the overseeing PT may have concerns that the orthotics are not appropriate for a child and they often bring in a consulting orthotist. By the time the child finishes the two- or three-week therapy session, they have received new braces, which will help them maintain the new skills acquired during their intensive session.

Patients also get a chance to try out equipment while at the clinic, such as specialized bikes, walkers and gait trainers. With the time to get to know the patients, the intensive physical therapy session may be the only time the child has ever had a chance to ride a bike designed for special needs.

Should all therapists get "intense"? Click here to visit the Therapy Times forum, post your response and see what other therapists are saying.

Source: Euro-Pēds