Givens Named Director of Physical Therapy

Dr. Deborah Givens, PT, DPT, PhD, will become the next Director of the UNC Division of Physical Therapy in January 2015. She will take over the leadership reins from Dr. Lisa Johnston, PT, MS, DPT, who has been serving as Interim Director since August 2013.

Dr. Givens is currently Professor and Chair of the Department of Physical Therapy in the School of Pharmacy and Health Professions at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. Prior to 2011, she was Director of the Physical Therapy Division in the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, College of Medicine, at The Ohio State University. She has been a leader in curricular reform, the advancement of residency education, and faculty development at both institutions.

“Dr. Givens brings a wealth of administrative, academic, research, and clinical experiences to the division, department, and larger university system,” said Dr. Stephen Hooper, PhD, Chair of the Department of Allied Health Sciences and Associate Dean for the UNC School of Medicine. “Her leadership will help the Division of Physical Therapy continue its legacy of excellence and grow to meet the ever-evolving demands of modern health care. Dr. Johnston and our Physical Therapy faculty have done a tremendous job maintaining the division’s strengths during our national search for a permanent director. Thanks to them, Dr. Givens will be able to hit the ground running in January.”

As Director of the Division of Physical Therapy, Dr. Givens will facilitate the management and ongoing development of the division’s nationally-ranked Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) program, Transitional DPT program, interdisciplinary Human Movement Science PhD program (administered jointly with the UNC Department of Exercise and Sports Science), and Physical Therapy Orthopedic Residency program (a collaboration with UNC Hospitals). In addition, she will promote and encourage the advancement of research conducted by Division of Physical Therapy faculty and through the Center for Human Movement Science, and clinical services provided through the faculty clinic, University Physical Therapy.

“The UNC Division of Physical Therapy has a long history of excellence in education and research – it is truly a gem,” said Dr. Givens. “I am honored to join the talented faculty and to serve as their leader as we work together to advance the mission and vision of the program. I look forward to working with the students and alumni, who I will count on to teach me the traditions that come with such a vibrant university.”

Dr. Givens is actively involved in physical therapy research. Her research addressing the neuromuscular consequences of lower back pain and exercise interventions has been funded by the NIH and the NFL. She has published her work in journals such as Physical Therapy, Journal of Orthopaedic & Sports Physical Therapy, Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise, and Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, and she is an Editorial Review Board Member for the Journal of Orthopaedic & Sports Physical Therapy.

Dr. Givens received her BS degree in Physical Therapy (’82) from Virginia Commonwealth University, her MS and tDPT degrees (’90, ’05), from the MGH Institute of Health Professions, and her PhD from the University of Iowa (’97).

“I am honored to join the talented faculty and to serve as their leader as we work together to advance the mission and vision of the program. I look forward to working with the students and alumni, who I will count on to teach me the traditions that come with such a vibrant university.”

- Dr. Debby Givens

PT STUDENTS ON THE HILL

UNC Physical Therapy students traveled to Washington, D.C., in April for the 2014 APTA Federal Advocacy Forum. The forum provides information on issues affecting the profession and gives PTs the opportunity to meet with legislators. UNC DPT students Michael Murray, Chris Hope, Lexie Williams, Amy Gwynn, Joe Miller, and Elizabeth Nixon met with U.S. Senator for North Carolina Richard Burr, pictured with the group at left.
NIH Grant Supports Interdisciplinary Research on Walking in the Real World After Stroke

Dr. Prudence Plummer, Assistant Professor, has received a NIH R21 grant to fund “Real-world assessment of dual-task performance after stroke,” an interdisciplinary endeavor involving researchers in physical therapy, biomedical engineering, and psycholinguistics. The grant will provide $275,000 in direct costs over two years.

Dr. Plummer and the project’s co-investigators, Drs. Carol Giuliani (UNC), Lori Altmann (University of Florida), and Bijan Najafi (University of Arizona) will examine how stroke survivors’ ability to walk in a real-world environment compares to their ability to walk in the research lab, and how that ability is affected by concurrent cognitive tasks, such as conversing.

“Being able to comfortably and confidently walk in public settings is a key determinant of community integration and participation, yet very little is known about the impact of the environment on gait after stroke,” said Plummer. “This research will provide new information about gait recovery after stroke and will help us to develop interventions to improve locomotor adaptability and safety.”

The study will involve 30 adults with stroke and 30 age and gender-matched healthy adults. Each participant will be assessed in single and three different variable-priority dual-task conditions (no-priority, gait-priority, cognitive-priority) in the laboratory and a real-world context (hospital lobby), and in two different dual-task combinations (walking while talking, walking while performing an executive function task).

Investigators will examine how gait with and without a concurrent cognitive task differs between the research lab and the real-world setting and whether individuals with stroke are able to flexibly prioritize their attention between gait and a simultaneous cognitive task in the lab and the real world. Additionally, researchers will establish estimates of minimal clinically important differences in dual-task interference on gait, which will enable them to identify the individuals with stroke that are most susceptible to clinically significant mobility disability in the real world.

2014 UNC Physical Therapy Golf Tournament

UNC’s Division of Physical Therapy hosted its 9th Annual Golf Tournament benefiting the Foundation for Physical Therapy and UNC’s Student Physical Therapy Association (SPTA) on Friday, September 12, 2014, at The Golf Club at Chapel Ridge in Pittsboro, NC. Third-year DPT students Blair Burnette, Mark Boles, and Deidra Debnam served as co-chairs for the event, and many other PT students volunteered to help make the event a success.