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Transcending clinic walls: Physical therapy transforms society through community engagement

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Our educational programs teach professionalism, advocacy, evidence-based engagement and community engagement. The vision statement of the APTA calls us to transform society. How is it possible to teach and learn skills of societal transformation when there is so much else to learn? The SEED-SCALE model involves the ability to learn to adapt and innovate across a broad spectrum of human experiences. It is the truest definition of evolutionary progress and societal transformation. SEED-SCALE standardizes a process for evolving locally specific solutions. Many of the worsening conditions of peoples' lives today are the result of earlier well-intentioned actions. Community and development programs may stimulate economic growth, but often do not benefit all people. These programs lift some or most, but often these programs thrive on disparity, benefitting only a few. Fundamental change happens in our lives because of what people do, making use of what they have, where they are today! Community action has the potential to scale up global solutions by integrating with systems of governance, technical expertise and cultural expression. Community-based growth occurs quickly as people teach each other, hold each other accountable and enact localized adaptive decisions in an iterative manner to respond to opportunities. Genuine human progress involves the use of human hands, hearts and minds to do what we can with what we have here, today. Empowerment is what people do using partnerships with structures of authority, outsiders and communities using bottom up, top down and inside out collaborations. By utilizing the World Health Organization's International Classification of Function (ICF) Model, physical therapists can analyze and understand the influence of racism, ableism and structural oppression as environmental factors that create poor health and inhibit participation in important life activities. Strategies to facilitate full participation are by becoming effective agents of change to eliminate injustice and marginalization.

Biography

Susan G Klappa is a Professor in the Doctor of Physical Therapy Program at Briar Cliff University, USA. She has completed her PhD in Education, Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Minnesota with a focus on community engagement and obtained her Masters of Physical Therapy degree from St. Catherine University. she is a PT educator and clinician who has practiced physical therapy internationally. She has a special interest in global and local public health. She has worked in outpatient clinics, at a Level I trauma center and in disaster relief tent hospitals with patients with neurological, cardiopulmonary, integumentary and other problems. Her research interests explore how inter-professional collaboration, global health work and international community engagement influence the formation of professional identity among physical therapists.

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