August 29, 2014

An Open Letter to UNITE HERE Local 8

The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) was recently contacted by one of your representatives, Levi Pine, and made aware of a boycott you have called of the Grand Hyatt Seattle (GHS), where we have an event scheduled to occur in September.

Before allowing APTA time to learn more about the issues surrounding the boycott and review our policies and precedents, Mr. Pine chose to escalate his actions. He and his colleagues personally entered several private physical therapy clinics in the Seattle area and aggressively insisted on seeing the owners and specific clinicians to demand they pressure APTA to cancel our agreement and meeting with the GHS. Because of the necessity to allow for mobility and access for patients of physical therapy, there is often no physical barrier between reception and treatment space. Members report that Mr. Pine and his associates at clinic after clinic have accosted patients and even interrupted treatment of patients, crossing a sacrosanct line with APTA and our members. Subsequently, Mr. Pine or other representatives have also contacted employers, supervisors, business partners, and even family members of elected and staff leaders of APTA, challenging them to pressure these individuals to change their position or actions. These actions cross all appropriate social boundaries, and we believe possibly even legal boundaries regarding harassment and coercion.

The confrontational tactics of Mr. Pine and his fellow organizers have made it impossible for APTA and UNITE HERE to have any meaningful dialogue on this topic. Rather than inspiring compassion in those whom they have targeted, the actions of Mr. Pine and colleagues have had the opposite effect at the clinics they have disrupted, serving only to damage the credibility of UNITE HERE in the eyes of our members. Whether or not the underlying intent of Mr. Pine’s actions was well-meaning, his tactics are unacceptable to APTA.

Our members do care about workers and workplace health and safety, an area in which we have common ground. In fact, many physical therapists help analyze work places and worker behavior to assure that conditions and processes are appropriate, safe, and effective. In regard to UNITE HERE, I have no doubt that we could have helped you identify professionals who could educate your members on how to do their work with less exposure to possible injury.

Organizationally, in light of our mission and vision, APTA takes issues of mobility, access, and workplace health and safety very seriously. All of our contracts require compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, and we routinely visit properties to assess, among other things, issues of accessibility. We also take labor relations issues seriously when vetting a venue for a meeting, and we ask hotel representatives about current or anticipated disputes. At the time of
APTA contract discussions with the GHS well over a year ago, there were no anticipated issues of this nature.

What we have learned from your own public material is that the boycott is intended to pressure the hotel to use a specific process for workers to unionize. Union organizing processes are not within the domain of physical therapists. We are not labor lawyers. We are not a political party. The workers at the hotel are serving guests every day, and to date have not chosen to be represented by UNITE HERE or any other union, nor have they voted as a group to call for a boycott. We do not believe it is APTA’s role to attempt to influence the workers or the employer.

APTA’s first loyalty is to our members and those whom they are serving. As such, our focus will continue to remain on ensuring the integrity of care given by our members in the Seattle area and across the country. We expect that you will honor that intention by ceasing intrusions into patient care and harassment of our members and leaders.

Yours sincerely,

J. Michael Bowers
Chief Executive Officer
American Physical Therapy Association