PHYSICAL THERAPISTS HELP PATIENTS WITH PARKISON DISEASE STAY ACTIVE

APTA hosts Move Forward Radio Segment during Parkinson’s Awareness Month

ALEXANDRIA, VA, April 18, 2013 — Parkinson disease (PD) is the second most common degenerative brain disorder, after Alzheimer disease. During Parkinson’s Awareness Month, the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) is building awareness of the role of the physical therapist (PT) in managing the effects of PD and the vital role of physical activity. APTA will host a Move Forward Radio segment, “Parkinson Disease and the Role of Physical Therapy,” at 11:00 am, ET, on April 18.

The segment features physical therapist and APTA member Terry Ellis, PT, PhD, NCS. Ellis is an assistant professor at Boston University College of Health & Rehabilitation Sciences: Sargent College in the department of physical therapy & athletic training. Her research focuses on investigating the impact of exercise and rehabilitation on the progression of disability in individuals with PD. Ellis is also the director of the Center for Neurorehabilitation at Boston University where she conducts research, provides clinical consultations, and education to health care professionals and to persons with neurological disorders. In addition, Ellis directs the American Parkinson Disease Association National Rehabilitation Resource Center housed at Boston University.

More common in men than women, PD is related to loss of nerve cells in the brain that produce dopamine, a chemical that plays an important role in controlling movement. Symptoms, which typically arise around age 60 and can vary widely, may include stiffness (rigidity), shaking (tremor), slowness with movement, and balance problems. Treatment may include medication and physical therapy—and, in some cases, surgery.

According to Ellis, “A common early symptom is a tremor in one hand or in the legs, most often while at rest. Tremors typically go away when moving and don't interfere substantially with daily function at this stage.”

As the condition progresses, symptoms may include movements becoming smaller, such as handwriting trailing off at the end of a sentence; slower movement; a feeling of stiffness or rigidity in the muscles; poor balance; or a sense of the feet “freezing” to the floor, making it difficult to take a first step.

A physical therapist can help manage PD symptoms by helping an individual stay as active and as independent as possible. Special exercises and techniques can combat the symptoms of PD. Ellis explained, “Depending on the nature and severity of the condition, a treatment program may focus on improving fitness level, strength, and flexibility; developing effective strategies to get in and out of bed, chairs, and cars; learning to turn over in bed more easily; standing and turning to change directions more efficiently; and improving the smoothness and coordination of walking.”

She added, “Parkinson disease can make daily activities seem frustrating and time-consuming. Your physical therapist will become a partner with you and your family to help you combat and manage the symptoms of PD. As your condition changes, your treatment program will be adjusted to help you be as independent and as active as possible.”

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For more information about a physical therapist’s role in managing PD, see the "Physical Therapist’s Guide to Parkinson Disease."

Many physical therapists are experienced in treating people with neurological disorders, and some practice with a neurological focus. In addition, physical therapists who are board-certified clinical specialists or who have completed a residency or fellowship in neurologic physical therapy have advanced knowledge, experience, and skills that may apply to this condition.

The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) represents more than 85,000 physical therapists, physical therapist assistants, and students of physical therapy nationwide. Learn more about conditions physical therapists can treat and find a physical therapist in your area at www.MoveForwardPT.com. Consumers are encouraged to follow us on Twitter (@MoveForwardPT) and Facebook.

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