

# Vision for the Future

Education abroad and old-fashioned American work ethic have shaped New Jersey therapist's thoughts about PT

By Brian W. Ferrie

At just 34 years old, Lance Knaub, DPT, PT, OCS, CSCS, has already carved out quite a niche for himself in the physical therapy world. Considering his dedication to the profession and vision for what it can be, it seems certain he will accomplish even more in future years.

Dr. Knaub's story begins in York, PA, about 75 miles west of Philadelphia, where he was born and raised.

"I knew in high school that I wanted a health care career," he told *ADVANCE*. "I originally started out as a pharmacy student when I went to college at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ. But while there I began volunteering at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital in New Brunswick, where they had some excellent physical therapists. It made me realize the skills involved with physical therapy and the power to make such a difference in so many people's lives."

Dr. Knaub changed his major to exercise science during his junior year at Rutgers and received his degree in May 1994. Returning home to York, he soon began working full-time at a rehabilitation hospital as a physical therapy aide and also in a separate capacity as an exercise specialist teaching aquatics classes as well as working with physicians, physical therapists and other healthcare professionals.

"I was working directly with patients and clients who were looking for better health," he explained. "During that time I also was lucky enough to work at a cerebral palsy facility. All of these different experiences made me positive that I wanted to go in a direction where I could help people, such as physical therapy."

## To the Highlands

But the direction he chose was certainly unconventional. In January 1996, Dr. Knaub began taking physical therapy classes at Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, Scotland, a city of about 200,000 on the North Sea.

"I knew that I wanted to pursue graduate studies in physical therapy," said Dr. Knaub. "The opportunity to study abroad was appealing, as well as the advanced training they had in manual therapy and evidence-based practice."



Lance Knaub, DPT, PT, OCS, CSCS, treats a patient at Breakthru Physical Therapy and Fitness, Medford, NJ.

Dr. Knaub spent two-and-a-half years in Scotland, earning a BSc Honors degree in mid-1998. While there, he also met his future wife Jodi Goldman, PT, a native New Yorker who had gone abroad for the same program.

Dr. Knaub discussed the benefits of studying across the Atlantic.

"Certainly I feel like [attending Robert Gordon University] gave me a strong educational foundation and great clinical experiences where I had the opportunity to learn some hands-on, manual therapy skills," he said. "I was also exposed to many different treatment styles and patient types."

## Coming Home

Upon returning to America, Dr. Knaub ended up in the Garden State again—this time working for a brain-injury rehab facility in south Jersey, specifically the town of Merchantville.

"My research in physical therapy school had been on brain injury and neurological rehabilitation," he explained. "So my first job was in that [aspect] of physical therapy. Then I started to do some per diem work in outpatient, particularly orthopedics. Down the road, I was offered a full-time position in outpatient orthopedics [for a different organization that also had locations in south Jersey] and that's when I was really able to apply some of that neurological experience to outpatient care and find my true passion or area of interest—including orthopedics, musculoskeletal physical therapy and sports medicine.

Working in that center and my next position gave me a lot of ideas. I really saw the trend of how physical therapy was coming together and could be so powerful when combined with the fitness and wellness industry.”

#### Further Education

Pursuing his interest in sports-related therapy, Dr. Knaub earned his CSCS credential from the National Strength and Conditioning Association in 1999. But that was far from the only way he furthered his education.

“I wanted to continue to advance my skills and knowledge,” he explained. “The University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ) in Newark was offering a transitional doctorate in physical therapy program. I took one class [in the fall of 2001] and loved it. Over the next couple years I completed my doctorate while working full-time and had a September 2003 graduation.”

That same year, Dr. Knaub also earned his OCS credential from the APTA and began teaching as an adjunct assistant professor for a joint program offered by Rutgers-Camden/UMDNJ-Stratford Campus, which he continues to do in the areas of exercise physiology, anatomy and orthopedics. Those goals accomplished, Dr. Knaub began to focus on another initiative that had been percolating in his mind—starting a private practice.

“Early on in my physical therapy career, I realized I had some desire to own a practice,” he related. “And it was partly out of frustration at some of the settings and situations that I and other therapists had been placed in. I really felt that as a therapist, I could do a better job in different environments and situations, for a lot of different reasons.”

Before he actually started a practice, however, there was something else that took priority for Dr. Knaub—his marriage to Jodi in May 2004. And Jodi is not only Lance’s wife; she would become his business partner as well. The two of them established Breakthru Physical Therapy in Medford, NJ, within weeks after the wedding.

#### Breaking Through

“We started Breakthru by subletting 300 square feet within a fitness center,” Dr. Knaub explained. “The natural symbiosis of physical therapy and fitness together was obvious. Many of our fitness members benefited from immediate access to healthcare practitioners and our patients were able to continue to address their health and fitness goals while decreasing their risk factors in a comfortable setting with supervision from professionals. We have now purchased the fitness center and are currently expanding and moving into a 6,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility. The new space will allow us to achieve our ultimate goal of true interdisciplinary care where the best professionals work together for the best outcomes for our patients and clients.”

The center treats a wide range of conditions, Dr. Knaub continued.

“Personally, I treat a lot of orthopedic problems from shoulder injuries such as tendonitis, impingement and rotator cuff tears to ACL tears and reconstructions—all types of musculoskeletal problems. And Jodi has expertise in movement and balance disorders and arthritis—she’s published in rheumatology textbooks in those areas. We also have other therapists, including a PTA and PT, with different areas of expertise.”

#### Collaborative Staff

In addition, the practice includes several massage therapists, personal trainers, a registered dietician and athletic trainers. Starting Breakthru in a dynamic fitness center, Dr. Knaub saw many patients

who came to him directly or were referred by the facility’s personal trainers and massage therapists for consultations due to pain or functional problems.

“Following a systems review and medical screen, I would perform a thorough neuromusculoskeletal exam to identify some of the impairments that were contributing and might be the underlying cause of the problem,” he explained. “I would then communicate my findings and recommendations to the person’s physicians to determine the optimal plan of care. The physicians were very receptive when presented with professional dialogue and informed about the research and effective treatment options that many times they were not even aware of.”

This type of communication has gained Dr. Knaub the respect of many local physicians, he noted, and also made him a referral source so that he is able to direct patients to the best health care professional for their problems.

#### Patient Advocacy

“I am able to be the patients’ advocate to ensure that they are referred to the top physicians in the area with the best training for the situation such as fellowship or board certification and would be a good fit for the patient. The health care system can be very complicated and intimidating—I feel that one of my primary roles is to use my expertise to help patients get the best results.”

This type of practice is able to fill a need for early access to physical therapy, which often can be difficult, including long waits to get doctor appointments and insurance approvals, he continued.

“For example, recent research with low-back pain found that the most accurate individual predictor for success is early treatment with patients who have symptoms for less than 16 days. We are able to see people early to get better results in less time.”

Dr. Knaub also believes that direct access and communication have enabled his center to be successful with patients whose physicians had not considered physical therapy.

“One of our members with knee pain after a meniscal tear was pain-free in three treatments,” he related. “Another was offered only injections for knee osteoarthritis by her rheumatologist but her insurance did not cover the cost, which was several thousand dollars. I recommended physical therapy and she was symptom-free and able to resume a fitness program for the health benefits she sought in approximately four weeks without the injections. People at other facilities may end up quitting or getting frustrated when trying to exercise and become healthier. With physical therapists on site working together with personal trainers, we can modify exercise so that our members can still be successful and won’t quit.”

#### Expanding Role

At Breakthru Physical Therapy and Fitness, therapists are also applying their expertise to areas of prevention and performance enhancement.

“This is an exciting time to practice because with the latest research and techniques we are able to help people more quickly and effectively than ever before,” concluded Dr. Knaub. “Physical therapy as a profession has traditionally been in places of sickness, such as hospitals, rehab facilities and nursing homes. I feel what we’re creating is really the future of physical therapy – with medical professionals coming together to offer their expertise in places of health and wellness.” ■

*Brian W. Ferrie is senior associate editor at ADVANCE and can be reached at bferrie@merion.com*