

From Apolitical to Active in Advocacy

Attending the APTA Federal Advocacy Forum (FAF) was truly a life-changing experience. Before Eva Norman came to speak to our physical therapy class, I had known little, if not anything about what advocacy looked like in physical therapy. Nor was I ever involved with politics at any point in my life. Growing up, my parents never talked about politics. I have voted in the past, but mainly because I felt the responsibility to do so having it be my constitutional right as a citizen. Up until I attended the FAF I saw myself as apolitical. I have always despised how polarized our political system is and I never thought that anything I could do would make a difference, so I never made the effort to understand. However, being a part of the FAF was an eye-opening experience that gave me a different perspective on what it meant to advocate for our profession.

When Eva first came to our class and talked about applying for the FAF scholarship, I had not known about the opportunity. When she asked who was interested in applying (which the application deadline was due the next day), only one person raised their hand. After asking Eva a few questions following her presentation, I was convinced that I would apply for the scholarship that evening. I spent hours constructing my (short) essay responses that evening/night and felt very confident once I hit that “send” button on my email. Unfortunately, I did not receive the scholarship...but that was okay! I was graciously offered a free hotel room and because of hearing about all the great opportunities the FAF could provide, I decided to accept that offer and ended up paying the rest of my way – and it was completely worth it!

In all honesty, I was pretty nervous putting myself out there and making the trip to D.C. to do something I have never even come close to doing before. I knew very little about advocacy in general, and I wasn't sure of what was expected of me to begin with. However, all of this changed starting the moment I landed. The group of Minnesota students all formed a friendship almost immediately and I felt like we had known each other for years. I met so many new people who all had similar interests and shared the same passion as me – a deep love for physical therapy. Over the course of about three days, I gained a greater awareness of the important legislative issues impacting physical therapists/physical therapy assistants, the patients we serve, and the profession as a whole. At the same time, I was able to expose myself to an environment where I did not know anybody but had the opportunity to meet everybody! This experience taught me two main things: First, it showed me the value of meeting new people and how sharing my story could lead to the development of new ideas and knowledge. The opposite was true as well. I learned a lot about some of the most passionate therapists from around the country, and I was given a plethora of great advice. And second, it taught me that I have a voice and I can make an impact on what I believe in. Having the opportunity to network with others who share the same passion as you is something special.

Before attending this event, I had heard about leadership at the state and federal level, but I didn't know what it was, what it meant, or how to do it. I viewed advocating

as this big process that only “top level” people in politics could do. This could not have been farther from the truth. I came to see that there is a short gap between the uncertainty of the unknown and feeling confident in what you do know. I was introduced to and taught by so many great mentors and friends that gave me the courage and knowledge to follow their footsteps as a leader in this profession. It has driven me to bridge that gap and help transform students into future leaders in our profession, just like my fellow educators did for me. Attending the FAF was an experience I will never forget, and I will use the valuable lessons I learned in my future (whether at future FAF’s, in the classroom amongst my peers, or even in practice). The main piece of advice I would give those who are attending the FAF is to put yourself out there and meet as many people as you can. Don’t be afraid to take the leap and challenge yourself as a student, constituent, and person. Attend every event the FAF has to offer, introduce yourself, and the rest will fall into place by itself.

I want to thank everyone that gave me the opportunity to make this experience happen! You have given me a new perspective on the importance of advocating for our profession – one that I wouldn’t have if it wasn’t for all of your support.

Chase Nier, SPT

2nd year DPT student

University of Minnesota – Twin Cities Doctor of Physical Therapy Program