Practice, Practice Practice

Therapists develop and implement treatment programs that incorporate evidence-based techniques to maximize physical functioning and development, prevent progression of existing impairments and the development of secondary disabilities, and to promote optimal quality of life across the life span. Physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech and language pathologists each identify the issues that reflect their own professional areas of expertise. They do, however, have in common, the limited amount of clinical treatment time available to interact with each student on their caseload. Scientific research in rehabilitation and motor learning has shown that practice is key in the development and improvement of all motor skills. More specifically, this practice must be extensive reflecting a great deal of repetition of the skill. School therapists rely on the rest of the treatment team to execute the repetition and practice needed. Classroom teachers and assistants encourage students to practice skills, and the Home Exercise Programs developed by therapists, are intended to provide opportunities for needed practice at home.

We may not remember when we each learned to walk but studies have revealed that we actually walk the length of a football field dozens of times, in one day, when we first practiced walking. Maybe we remember learning to play soccer or soft ball, or roller skating or tennis, or writing cursive. As typically developing kids we mastered “script” after years of practice and the mature gait pattern (how we walk) emerges when we are 7 years old – also years and years of practice. So our students require the same amount of practice to acquire all the skills we want them to learn; all those skills we included in their IEP’s. Without that practice, it can’t be expected that these skills will become part of everyday repertoire. The practice and repetition of each activity is so important because the skills in the IEP are so important. They are skills that will allow our students to function to the best of their ability at home, in school, and after they graduate to a vocational setting. The best part of this science is that research has also shown that we can learn at any age. It is never too late!

So……. Please help our students by practicing, practicing, and practicing!!!!!

Submitted by Deborah Eisenberg, PT, DPT, MS.

Physical Therapist