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Paul Tenorio, PT, DPT Physical Therapist, SMUCLA

Helping Patients Heal, One Step at a Time

Paul moved from New Jersey to Santa Monica to join the UCLA Health System team where he helps patients physically regain control of their lives and emotionally regain independence.

What are your job responsibilities?

I am primarily working as the physical therapist liaison for geriatrics and oncology. I also see other patients in various departments throughout SMUCLA, including telemetry, orthopaedics, and med. surg.

How did you become interested in physical therapy?

I volunteered in various clinics and hospitals during my senior year in high school. I found myself enjoying the time spent with the physical therapists and their interaction with patients. My first unforgettable experience was in a nursing home involving an amputee who was barely able to sit upright in bed. After a week of physical therapy, she was able to walk the entire length of the hallway of the unit. Instances like this motivated me to become a physical therapist. I have been working at SMUCLA for almost three years and my passion for this profession only intensifies with each passing day.

Do you find helping patients physically challenging?

The patient's safety always comes first. Some situations may require assistance from the nurse or rehab aide. The most important thing that helps me during therapy is maintaining proper body mechanics. This not only ensures my safety, but also the patient's safety during his or her therapy session.

How do you deal with patients who are not motivated to participate in treatment?

I frequently remind patients of their goals for physical therapy that we had established together. I find that this motivates them to continue to work hard. In addition, I encourage family members to provide support to the patient during their therapy session. Some patients respond extremely well to having familiar faces encouraging them to do their best.

What drives you to be so passionate about your job?

Seeing the true joy in patients' faces after they succeed in what they once thought was impossible is what drives me to be passionate in this profession. Knowing that I have the ability to make a positive difference in a person's life motivates me to provide the best quality of care to each individual. I know that it may be difficult at times, but the end result in achieving the patient's goal makes it all worthwhile.

Do you have any memorable patient stories you would like to share?

There was a young lady on the oncology floor who had suffered from spinal cord compression and had lost the ability to use her lower extremities. Her ultimate goals were to be able to stand and walk again. During the early stages of her therapy, it was very difficult for her to sit upright in bed. So first, our focus was to work on her sitting balance. It took a few weeks before she was able to sit on the edge of the bed independently. The next step was to work on her transfers from the bed to wheelchair using the transfer board. Through determination, hard work and perseverance, she was able to achieve this goal. Being able to do the transfer sent tears of joy down her face because she felt independent once again. She proudly propelled her wheelchair towards the nurses' station and there was not one dry eye in the unit that day. It gives me so much joy to empower patients to make what they think impossible, possible.

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

I love to travel, spend time with family and friends, play beach volleyball, hike, camp and go on medical missions.

Tell me about the medical missions.

I am involved in an outreach program with a Catholic Church based in New Jersey and also partake in medical missions in the Philippines and more recently in the Dominican Republic. It felt so rewarding being able to provide medical care to those who otherwise could not afford it. During my first mission trip to the Philippines, our team was able to provide medical care to over 6,000 patients in four days! These mission trips have been very humbling and life-altering experiences for me.