

# Hope is a Muscle

By Sarah R. Blanton, PT, DPT, NCS, Editor-in-Chief

*“Hope is an act of imagination, a leap of imagination that has real world consequences.”*

—Bryan Stevenson

*“Hope is a muscle, a practice, a choice that actually propels new realities into being. And it’s a muscle we can strengthen.”*

—Krista Tippett

Grappling with this next phase of the pandemic, we are called to be fully present in this shifting space while deeply reflecting on the challenging time we have endured. At the moment, we are pressed to look toward a future of healing that, as yet, remains just out of reach. Our CHEP-JHR student essay prompt for this year is a reflection I think we might collectively contemplate:

*The pandemic highlighted a critical need to reimagine education in physical therapy, as programs had to quickly pivot to adopt virtual learning environments. Standing on the edges of the crisis, we are emerging forever changed individually, institutionally, and professionally.*

*As you consider the challenges and benefits of remote learning from a student perspective, how has this unique experience impacted your image of yourself as a*

*physical therapy professional? How has your idea of physical therapy training and practice changed?*

How we respond to this transition depends upon our ability to cultivate a sense of agency and find support for our inner strength, individually and collaboratively. How do we rise to meet these lessons from a landscape of loss, transforming to a horizon of hope?

In my own journey, I am finding an invaluable compass in Krista Tippett’s [OnBeing Wisdom app](#) course “Practicing Hope.” I agree wholeheartedly with her observation that “hope is a feature of every wise and graceful life I have ever encountered.” She offers this definition:

*“Hope is a muscle, a practice, a choice that actually propels new realities into being. And it’s a muscle we can strengthen. It is not the same as idealism or optimism. This kind of hope has nothing to do with wishful thinking. Hope as I’ve seen it lived is at once fierce and persistently joyful. I’ve come to understand this quality of hope as an essential foundation and power for the generative story, the generative landscape, that is emerging out of all of the rupture this moment in the life of the world has laid bare.”*

As [Bryan Stevenson](#) describes: “Hope is an act of imagination, a leap of imagination that has real world consequences... Hope is the thing that gets you to stand up when others say, ‘Sit down.’ It’s the thing that gets you to speak when others say, ‘Be quiet.’”

In the field of rehabilitation, we begin each relationship, whether clinician with patient or instructor with student, with a mutual commitment to hope. Hope for healing, hope for learning, hope that this therapeutic relationship leaves both of us better for the interaction. We deal in the currency of hope every day—sometimes leaving richer, but sometimes poorer.

Why is that? Why do we often assign a two-dimensional prognosis-of-function to a multi-layered and complex lived experience of disability? “Will I walk again?” the patient pleads. I wonder if we spend so much time on the evidence-based answer, that we overlook the person behind the question. If hope *is* a muscle, a practice that can help reimagine another person’s life, then it becomes a moral choice. Akin to other character virtues we seek to cultivate in our students and colleagues, what would it look like for dimensions of hope to be explored in our curricula alongside ethics of caring and professional integrity? Such an examination demands deep thinking, critical reflexivity, a moral imagination—and a humanities framework. We struggle to respond to another’s definition of hope until we have grappled with our own meaning. To bear witness to another’s suffering demands a special type of hope—one that is strong enough to endure uncertainty and pain while also patient enough to maintain a curiosity during a stumbling journey toward a new source of optimism, of belief.

When we embrace that rehabilitation is a field of applied hope, we underscore the importance of

gaining skills to recognize, explore, cultivate and honor hope in each other. We recognize that building up this muscle of hope takes practice. Take a moment, and ask yourself: How have I embodied hope in my life? Do I understand, really understand, what gives hope to the patients I saw today? What gives hope to the students I taught today? To the people I simply encountered today? How can I stay curious to this concept of hope?

Why is this so important? I lean on insight from [Bryan Stevenson](#): “You should not underestimate the power you have to affirm the humanity and dignity of the people who are around you. And when you do that, they will teach you something about what you need to learn about human dignity, but also what you can do to be a change agent.”

**We are continuing with our designated themed series** dedicated to topics of social justice as well as the experiences of people caught in the COVID-19 pandemic. We encourage our readers to consider sharing their reflections and perspectives as we forge deeper connections together to envision, with hope, our collective future.

Our Fall 2021 issue of *JHR* offers us opportunities to explore these deeper meanings through the humanities lens, and find hope in many forms. The articles and essays include:

### [\*\*Is the Assumption of the Autonomous Individual Holding Us Back in Vocational Rehabilitation?\*\*](#)

By Joanna K Fadyl, PhD; Lynette Reid, PhD; Christine Cummins, MHSc; and Barbara E Gibson, PhD

Presenting an intriguing exploration of professional mindsets, Joanna K. Fadyl, in a creative collaboration with colleagues, argues that assumptions regarding individual autonomy are indeed holding rehabilitation

practices back. The article calls on wide-ranging concepts such as that of *whānau* in Kaupapa Māori scholarship and *assemblage* within critical disability studies, to explore different understandings of what an individual actually is—and how assumptions can affect healing. She expresses the hope that exploring these and other concepts might help us perceive individuals as “collective constellations and configurations, rather than autonomous units.”

### [A Reorientation of Belief: Considerations for Increasing the Recruitment of Black Students Into Canadian Physiotherapy Programs](#)

By Paulina Wegrzyn, MScPT; Celina Evans, MScPT; Gina Janczyn, MScPT; Jasline Judge, MScPT; Remi Lu, MScPT; Rahim Manji, MScPT; Julia Gray, PhD; Meredith Smith, MScPT; and Stephanie A. Nixon, PhD

Guided by the work of cultural theorist Sara Ahmed and critical race scholar Camara Phyllis Jones, these authors explore the perspectives of experts regarding barriers to and opportunities for increasing the recruitment of Black students into physical therapy programs in Canada. Three themes emerge from this qualitative study: the field of physical therapy as a white space; the fact that white orientation of physical therapy limits Black people; and the goal of co-creating an inclusive physical therapy profession. The authors invite readers to focus on fundamental change by *unlearning* previous assumptions.

### [Toward a Social Psychoanalysis of Rehabilitation Practice](#)

By Thomas Abrams, PhD

In a thought-provoking piece, Thomas Abrams calls on the works of Sigmund Freud, and of modern critics and interpreters of Freud, to explore the

rehabilitation clinic as a “space of desire.” What desires motivate patients and rehabilitation teams alike? How do those desires affect healing? He introduces the reader to a fresh perspective on the rehabilitative process—offering a glimpse of what it might become if a deeper psychoanalytic focus were applied to it. “To treat the clinical space as a libidinal space is, I would argue, a critical and political act,” he states.

### [Art History as a Resource for Understanding Social Bias in Disability](#)

By Brick Johnstone, PhD, ABPP

In a dramatic presentation of imagery past and present, Brick Johnstone invites readers to consider ongoing attitudes toward persons with disabilities. From painful depictions of cruelty directed at disabled individuals over the centuries, to eye-opening reports of lingering attitudes in present times, the article demonstrates how difficult it can be to change human minds. The author offers suggestions for the use of visual arts “to educate rehabilitation professionals regarding individual and societal biases of disability.”

### [Community Mobility Method Selection in Individuals With iSCI: A Qualitative Analysis](#)

By Carey L. Holleran, MPT, DHS, NCS; Jennifer Fogo, PhD, OTR; Stephanie A. Miller, PT, PhD, NCS; and T. George Hornby, PT, PhD

A primary rehabilitation goal for individuals with motor incomplete spinal cord injury (iSCI) is to regain their walking abilities. But what factors influence their paths to achieving that goal? Although quantitative information may be readily available in the clinic, these authors note that there is a paucity of qualitative information detailing each individual’s personal choices regarding mobility methods. Through

extensive interviews, this groundbreaking study presents a range of deeper factors to consider when working with an individual to achieve community mobility.

### [Humanity a Plenty](#)

By Jim Carey, PhD, PT, FAPTA

This eloquent and empathetic poem is accompanied by a photograph of a woman dressed in protective gear. The woman in the photo happens to be the author's daughter—who works daily in hospice care with coronavirus patients. The author offers the poem and photo to send a simple, compelling message about preserving humanity in these difficult times.

### [Piloting a Photography Program as Recreational Therapy for Adults With Spinal Cord Injury](#)

By Yaga Szlachcic, MD; Nicole Bayus, MA; and Michael A. Ziegler, BA

This article and the photos that accompany it speak volumes about the lives and perspectives of the photographers presented: SCI patients at the Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center in Los Angeles. The authors describe the development of their pilot program of educational courses in photographic arts offered to adults with SCI at 'Rancho.' The result is these poignant and moving photographs, demonstrating with images—and a few insightful words from their creators—how art can lift the human spirit above life's challenges.

### [Defining What 'Care' Means: A Book Review of \*The Soul of Care: The Moral Education of a Husband and a Doctor\*](#)

By Bruce Greenfield, PT, MA (Bioethics), PhD, FAPTA

Arthur Kleinman's new book takes a hard look at what 'care' means by taking the reader on his own personal journey—one that led to the challenge of caring for his wife. In this insightful summary, Bruce Greenfield highlights Kleinman's call to "move beyond a narrow definition of caring as technical excellence to caring based on a continuous healing relationship ..." This is the true patient-centered care, Greenfield notes, "where patient values, goals, needs, expectations, and fears are invited into the decision-making process." He encourages readers to explore their own capacities for true caring by reading this courageous book.

### **JHR-CHEP Student Narrative Essay Finalists**

Congratulations to Xavier Gibson, SPT (Springfield College) and Henry Fok, SPT (Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons), the finalists of the 4<sup>th</sup> annual physical therapy student essay contest co-sponsored by the ACAPT Consortium for the Humanities, Ethics, and Professionalism (CHEP) and the *JHR!*

### [The Therapist Advocate: Transcending Knowledge and Skill to Address Societal Needs](#)

By Xavier Alexander Gibson, SPT

In the beginnings of the Black Lives Matter movement, Xavier Gibson was studying for his DPT. "Important muscles and important social movements; how could I possibly weave a life as a future healthcare provider while being an advocate for

change?” he asked himself. In this essay, he details how he was able to coalesce his roles as student and advocate by developing a creative presentation at his university’s ground-breaking event, “S.E.A.T. at the Table.” By expressing his commitment to change, he encourages others entering the profession to strive to become therapist-advocates.

### [Do You Have the Coronavirus?](#)

By Henry Fok, SPT

On a day that should have been memorable for its joy, Henry Fok had an encounter that would ultimately inspire him to re-examine his future role as a physical therapist. He and his fiancée were attending the wedding of his best friend from college when, out of the blue, came the question in this essay’s title. “It was to me a joke disguised as an ethnic slur,” he notes. This essay details Fok’s thought process as he ponders the encounter – and steadily strengthens his conviction to fight racism through “thoughtful communication”—as a person and a professional.

### [Fall 2021 Resources by the Humanities Committee](#)

By Amber Baas, SPT; Nela Handac, SPT; Stefano Campana, SPT; and Madison Beasley, SPT

For the Fall 2021 issue of *JHR*, we have invited the Emory DPT Humanities Committee to contribute these resources, which aim to not only “broaden our understanding of the human experience, but to help us develop ways to approach new or different experiences.”

**We are pleased** to announce the 2020 recipient of the *Frank S. Blanton, Jr., MD, Humanities in Rehabilitation Scholar* award, Eric Holshouser, PT, DPT, MBA, PE. Dr. Holshouser exemplifies a

compelling character with a wonderful combination of sincerity, humility, and joy that shines through in his approach to work and relationships. These qualities, in combination with a solid ethical compass, strong intellect, and deep passion for personal and professional growth, made him a natural fit for this scholarship award. After graduation, we are excited that he will continue on as *JHR*’s first business manager.

### **The Fifth Annual Student Essay Contest is Now Open for Submissions!**

The essay prompt for the 2021-2022 physical therapy student essay contest is:

*The pandemic highlighted a critical need to reimagine education in physical therapy, as programs had to quickly pivot to adopt virtual learning environments. Standing on the edges of the crisis, we are emerging forever changed individually, institutionally, and professionally. As you consider the challenges and benefits of remote learning from a student perspective, how has this unique experience impacted your image of yourself as a physical therapy professional? Using details and analysis from a specific experience, explain how your idea of physical therapy education, training, and practice have changed. This narrative essay should describe the experience and your reaction to it. It should explain what you learned from the situation and what that lesson means for you as a physical therapist, along with the field of physical therapy more broadly.*

**Timeline:** Submissions will be accepted until January 7, 2022. The winner and two finalists will be announced in the Spring 2022 issue of *JHR*. For more details, see our [CHEP-JHR contest webpage](#). For more information about CHEP, please see their [CHEP](#) webpage.

**Thank you for joining us.** We hope you find inspiration—and hope—in the Fall 2021 issue of *JHR*.

If you are interested in submitting your work to *JHR*, please review our [Submission Guidelines](#). If you are considering being a reviewer, please contact Dr. Sarah

Blanton: follow the [Contact](#) link, indicate the content area you are interested in reviewing, and attach your CV.

## *About the Author*



Dr. Sarah Blanton is a Professor of Rehabilitation Medicine at Emory University School of Medicine, Division of Physical Therapy. She graduated from the University of Virginia in 1987 with a BA degree in biology, from Emory University in 1992 with her masters in physical therapy and received her clinical doctorate in physical therapy in 2003. She has a specialty certification in Neurology through the American Board of Physical Therapy. Dr. Blanton has had several research grants exploring the integration of caregivers into the rehabilitation process and her current research focus examines the impact of using a telehealth platform for the delivery of a theory-based, family-focused intervention program for stroke survivors and their carepartners in the home setting. Dr. Blanton's Lab, DISCOVER (Digital Scholarship Enhancing Rehabilitation), explores various ways digital scholarship can enhance rehabilitation research, education and clinical practice and promote interdisciplinary collaboration. Dr. Blanton is a Fellow of the National Academy of Practice in Physical Therapy. In 2018, she was awarded the American Physical Therapy Association Societal Impact Award and the Emory University Creativity and Arts award for healthcare faculty.

Dr. Blanton's interest in the *Journal of Humanities in Rehabilitation* stems from her ongoing exploration of the intersections of creativity and spirituality to gain insight into the human experience of suffering, joy and mystery. In her teaching, she has found the use of narrative to be an exceptionally powerful tool to foster reflection and personal insight for both students and patients. In her research, she is incorporating multimedia formats to develop family education interventions in the home environment. A photographer since childhood, she has enjoyed sharing her artwork through exhibits at Emory University, speaking with chaplaincy students on "Reflections of Art and Spirituality in Appalachia" and as a guest contributor to the Public Radio show, *On Being*.