Volunteer Clinical Faculty Spotlight: Heidi Engel, PT, DPT

Dr. Engel pictured here (second from left) with colleagues at the Society of Critical Care Medicine (SCCM) conference.

Heidi Engel, PT, DPT, Assistant Professor, without salary

Dr. Engel is a tireless and dedicated member of the UCSF/SFSU DPT Volunteer Faculty. She began her UCSF Without Salary Appointment in 2014, and since that time has taught and mentored hundreds of PT students both in the classroom and on the floors of the hospital. She has served as a clinical instructor for UCSF/SFSU students, provides lectures in oncology rehabilitation and physical therapy management of patients in the intensive care unit (ICU), and developed and teaches a very popular elective course in mobilization of patients in the ICU for 3rd year DPT students.

She has been a member of the UCSF community since 1988. Prior to her influential work on early mobilization in the ICU, Dr. Engel was instrumental in increasing rehabilitation services for patients with cancer who were hospitalized at UCSF. Currently, she provides physical therapy services full time in the ICU. Her focus in this area began in 2008, with formation of the ICU Early Mobility Inter-Professional Group, and initiated full time physical therapy in the UCSF Medical Surgical ICU 2010.

Dr. Engel has received national recognition for her work in early mobilization of patients in the ICU. In 2014, Dr. Engel and alumna Monica Rivera, PT, MS, DPTSc, were awarded the Jack Walker Award. This award honors authors who publish novel and innovative research in
Physical Therapy that makes an important contribution to clinical practice and patient care. Their article “Physical Therapist Established Intensive Care Unit Early Mobilization Program: Quality Improvement Project for Critical Care at the University of California San Francisco Medical Center,” described a quality improvement project, implemented by physical therapy, at UCSF. The project was designed to reduce patients’ ICU length of stay by increasing the number of patients receiving physical therapy in the ICU and reducing the time from ICU admission to initiation of physical therapy. During the study period, the number of patients receiving physical therapy in the ICU increased and the median times from ICU admission to initiation of physical therapy evaluation decreased. The ICU length of stay decreased by 2 days, on average, and the percent of ambulatory patients discharged to home increased. (Engel H, Tatebe S, Alonzo PB, Mustille RL, Rivera MJ. Physical therapist-established intensive care unit early mobilization program: quality improvement project for critical care at the University of California San Francisco Medical Center. Phys Ther. 2013;93(7):975-85.)

Also in 2014, Dr. Engel received the Presidential Citation, Contribution to Critical Care Medicine, from the Society for Critical Care Medicine. Dr. Engel continues her research in this area. She has two projects underway: one is still in data collection phase, and she is preparing the other for dissemination.

She is an active member of the American Physical Therapy Association (Acute Care and Oncology Sections, Palliative Care Special Interest Group), the Society of Critical Care Medicine, and the American Delirium Society. She is deeply involved with the development and writing of the APTA Clinical Practice Guidelines for PT interventions in the ICU. She serves the Society of Critical Care Medicine as a member of the Steering Committee for the Implementation of Pain Agitation and Delirium Guidelines Task Force (ICU Liberation Campaign). Dr. Engel also found the time, and energy, to work in a number of other settings outside of UCSF, including private practice outpatient, sports medicine, and home health settings. She has also served as a clinical instructor for the Institute for Healthcare Improvement Critical Care Seminars and for Everest Continuing Education Seminars, and has been a volunteer for Zen Hospice in San Francisco, establishing a Physical Therapy Volunteer Program there.

Dr. Engel graduated Cum Laude from Boston University in 1987 with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Physical Therapy. She earned her Doctorate in Physical Therapy in 2007 from Boston University, with an emphasis in Oncology and Integrative Medicine. Dr. Engel’s goals are to have more ICU patients everywhere look like those in the photograph - on mechanical ventilation, out of bed, visiting with family and pet dog on his lap.

Thank you, Dr. Engel for your contributions to our DPT students, our program, all patients, and our profession!

-- Betty Smoot

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