

Reversal!

When a Therapist Becomes a Patient

I smirk a little when I tell people I went to grad school in Flint. Some great things are happening there with the Health and Wellness Center and campus dormitories. I graduated from the Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) program in December 2003 from the University of Michigan-Flint. Just in time to be present for the opening of the William S. White building and the creation of the DPT degree. I worked for two years as a physical therapist before my life changing conversation with my PCP (Primary Care Physician). Before I get into that, let me tell you a little bit about myself. I'm the consummate underdog.

"You're too small to play sports."
"Your GPA isn't good enough to go to grad school."
You want to move to San Diego? You don't know anyone there!"
People are always telling me what I can't do. I tell them to shut up while I focus on how I'm going to do "it".
I always enjoy a good laugh. In PT school, I would sit in the back with my friends and watch one of our classmates doze off then call his cell phone. We would always try to hold in our laughter watching him perk up and search frantically for his phone. He should have learned to turn it off the first time we did

it. I'm also a huge nerd. I used to type out ALL my class notes and carry my clipboard everywhere. For this, I took a lot of verbal abuse from my classmates.
On my last clinical in PT school, I woke up one morning and decided to move across the country to San Diego after graduation. So I did. Things were going great and I was on top of the world. That all changed when I got a call from my PCP.
In September 2005 I was diagnosed with a golf-ball sized brain tumor at the base of my brain between the brain stem and cerebellum. In a month I had brain surgery to have it removed. I also had radiation therapy and a lengthy dose of outpatient physical and occupational therapy. Like most young people, I thought I was invincible. I found out the hard way I'm not.

I somehow ended up in a very strange predicament. As physical therapists, it is our job to help people regain their function in everyday life. Now I would be on the receiving end of this relationship. What was even stranger was the fact that the people I used to work side by side with were now working with me as a patient. You see, after my brain surgery I was left with impaired coordination, double vision, an extremely weak voice, and the inability to walk. My cognition and motivation were 100% normal when I got home, but since I was not perceived by other people as "normal," I got some peculiar responses. Lucky for me, this would all be a temporary inconvenience.
As physical therapists, it is ingrained in our practice to be good teachers. Since I cannot return to my career as a PT yet,

I decided to publish a book based on my personal blog about my experiences as a young adult rehab patient and healthcare professional. I decided that my experiences would be a unique learning opportunity for others. I started this project because I realized there is little funding for brain tumor research and young adult patients are a population that often times gets overlooked in favor of the "cute" pediatric population, the "wise/respected" geriatric population, or the "established" adult population.

Writing has always been a secret hobby of mine. In high school, I was a typical "jock," but my English teacher made us write in journals for 10 minutes before class began. I really looked forward to going to English every day. In college I was too busy with all my extra curricular activities to continue writing. After grad school I rediscovered my enjoyment of writing through blogging and am developing a small following. In physical therapy school, when most of my classmates groaned about writing a new paper, I always looked forward to the challenge.
Ten months after my surgery I wanted to walk a charity 5K to raise money for the National Brain Tumor Foundation.



Eric (second from the right, bottom row) and his friends raised over \$11,000 in sponsorships for the National Brain Tumor Foundation.

you walk away from the experience with a genuine lesson you can use or pass on to others. You will always be stuck where you are unless you try something new.
- Eric Anthony Galvez
Eric currently resides in San Diego, California. He graduated with a DPT degree from the University of Michigan-Flint in December 2003. The Department

of Physical Therapy and Eric's classmates hold a special place in their heart for him and encourage you to visit his Web site at www.ericgalvezdpt.com. There you can find more information about Eric the author, his charities, pictures, and the book: *Reversal: When a Therapist Becomes a Patient*. He will be back in Flint October 5, 2007 for a book signing at UM-Flint's bookstore.

I like challenges because if you fail, "big deal!" At least you know your limits and hopefully you learn something. In the big picture it's not really a "failure" if you walk away from the experience with a genuine lesson you can use or pass on to others.
-Eric Anthony Galvez

People thought I was crazy for even trying this because I could barely walk with a walker.
"You can't even walk 100 yards. How are you going to walk 3.1 miles?"
One of the first people I called was my good friend and colleague from PT school, Anang Chokshi. Anang lives in LA, about 2 hours from me in San Diego. Together we lead a team that raised over \$11,000. We even won a trophy for being the top fundraising team in the uber glamorous Orange County!
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As a patient, Eric needed help from many co-workers during his rehabilitation.



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