

Beyond Clinical Exposure: Transforming Residency Learning Experiences into Specialty-level Cardiopulmonary Practice

Presenter Names:

Ryan Smith, PT, DPT, ATC

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Kait DiGiovine, PT, DPT

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Session Description:

What transforms an entry-level clinician into a cardiopulmonary specialist? Often, it's the educational experiences that occur beyond routine patient care.

Cardiopulmonary residency training immerses residents in unique learning opportunities; including operating room observations, specialty clinics, interdisciplinary shadowing, and collaborative education with nursing and other healthcare professionals, that deepen clinical reasoning and enhance patient outcomes.

Using compelling patient cases from this year's graduating cardiopulmonary PT residents, this session will demonstrate how these experiences influenced examination, clinical decision-making, and intervention selection in real-world practice. Attendees will be challenged to apply their own clinical reasoning alongside the residents and gain an up-close view of the journey from clinician to specialist.

Participants will leave inspired by new possibilities for professional development and equipped with specialty-level knowledge and practical takeaways that can immediately enhance clinical practice.

Learning Objectives:

Upon completion of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Describe unique educational experiences within cardiopulmonary residency training that support specialist development.
2. Explain how observational and interprofessional learning experiences contribute to advanced clinical reasoning.
3. Apply knowledge gained through didactic education and literature appraisal to complex cardiopulmonary patient management.
4. Recognize how residency educational experiences translate into specialized, evidence-informed patient care

Speaker Bios:

Ryan Smith, PT, DPT, is originally from Columbia SC and received his undergraduate degree in Athletic Training from Winthrop University before completing his Doctorate of Physical Therapy at Wingate University. Ryan then went on to complete a Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Physical Therapy Residency

at the University of Utah in 2026. Ryan is passionate about bridging gaps in critical care rehabilitation by bringing early mobility expertise to rural and critical access hospitals in his role as a traveling physical therapist, as well as working with cardiovascular and pulmonary patient populations."

Kait DiGiovine, PT, DPT earned her Doctor of Physical Therapy degree from The Ohio State University in 2025 and completed a Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Physical Therapy Residency at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center. She currently practices at Loyola University Medical Center in the Chicago area. Kait's clinical interests include early mobilization of critically ill patients requiring mechanical circulatory support and improving outcomes for patients before and after heart and lung transplantation. She has presented nationally on burn rehabilitation and eccentric exercise for spinal cord injury, contributed to research on inspiratory muscle training in lung transplant recipients, and enjoys advancing cardiovascular and pulmonary physical therapy through research and education.

Nicole Budzynski, PT, DPT graduated with her Doctorate of Physical Therapy from Marquette University in 2025. She is the current Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Physical Therapy Resident at Advocate Christ Medical Center through Advocate Health Care. In this role, she has gained experience across a variety of specialized settings, including adult and pediatric cardiac intensive care units, the Adult Surgical Heart Unit, and Christ's outpatient cardiopulmonary physical therapy clinic. Nicole is passionate about educating colleagues, students, and the broader healthcare community about the importance of cardiovascular and pulmonary physical therapy. She is an active member of Advocate Health Care's Cardiopulmonary Practice Council, where she has led continuing education programming for fellow colleagues. In addition, she has presented nationally on a variety of cardiovascular and pulmonary rehabilitation topics and serves as a teaching assistant in the Doctor of Physical Therapy program at North Central College, where she enjoys mentoring future physical therapists and fostering their interest in the cardiovascular and pulmonary specialty.

Haley Bento, PT, DPT, CCS is a cardiovascular and pulmonary specialist with over a decade of clinical and teaching experience. She is an assistant professor within the University of Utah's Department of Physical Therapy & Athletic Training and Director of University of Utah's Acute Care PT Residency and Cardiopulmonary PT residency programs. She currently serves as the residency liaison for the academy of cardiovascular and pulmonary PT.