**Observation Hours for Physical Therapy Clinics**

**The aim of this document is to help you properly contact and reach out to the available sites in a professional way to gain these experiences**

Observation hours are necessary to apply for physical therapy programs across the United States. Many clinics in the San Diego area are willing and able to take students on as volunteers, or even potentially as PT aides, to help students complete their required observation hours. These observation hours give you a chance to see what it is like to be in a physical therapy clinic, observe and participate in the day-to-day activities that come with it, and experience what a PT does. These observation experiences are an integral part of helping you decide to pursue higher education in this field.

1) **Find a clinic.** Look for clinics or hospitals accepting undergraduate students for volunteer or observation hours. Generally, clinics are more willing to accept volunteers year-round, whereas hospitals require more lengthy verification processes to allow you into these roles. If you are just starting out and/or still deciding if PT is the career you’d like to pursue, start by looking at an outpatient clinic first. Look for the types of care they provide or patients they serve and if that fits with a type of place you think you might want to be, that may be a good place to start. A link on the ENS Pre-Physical Therapy page provides a list of clinics to give you a place to start. Choose a few clinics to start.

2) **Reach out to 2-3 clinics.** Generally, clinics will have a contact person who helps bring on volunteers for observation hours, and depending upon the clinic and person, this is usually done through email or phone contact. Once you have found a few clinics that look interesting to you, figure out who their contact person is (some of this is already highlighted on the clinic list link), and contact them by email or phone. A sample email or phone script is below:

*Dear XXXX,*

*My name is XXXX and I am an undergraduate student at SDSU looking for a clinic to do some observation hours/volunteer time at. I have been interested in the field of physical therapy because XXXX and I think your clinic would be a great fit because XXXX. If you have the ability to have me come in, I would love to take that opportunity. My contact information is: XXXX. Looking forward to hearing from you soon.*

*XXXX*

It is a good idea to personalize this generic script more to make sure you stand out from other potential volunteers. If you are granted a spot at a location, make sure to ask about hours and what professional dress code is at the clinic. Additionally, if you need to complete a certain number of hours, be clear about this so the clinic knows how long you will volunteer/when you will finish your observation experience.

3) **Complete your observation hours**. Some physical therapy schools require observation hours at multiple locations or even multiple types of physical therapy settings, so if you continue to decide that physical therapy is a career that you would like to pursue, keep that in mind. You can find the updated admissions requirements for every school by following the link on the ENS Pre-Physical Therapy webpage. Remember to represent yourself well and learn as much as you can at every clinic or setting you are in – people always take notice! You never know when a volunteer role may turn into a paid role or job in the future!