

In Tribute: Dennis L. Hart, PT, PhD, A Functional Outcome Measurement Visionary

J Orthop Sports Phys Ther 2012;42(6):489-490. doi:10.2519/jospt.2012.0109

On April 11, 2012, our physical therapy profession lost yet another esteemed colleague after an extended battle with cancer. Although Dennis is not with us physically, we are confident that his uncompromising love and contributions to our physical therapy profession will live on. Dennis was a clinician, national and international speaker, and renowned researcher, educator, and author. He started his education at Northeastern University as a math major before changing his major and graduating in 1971 to begin his career in physical therapy. He continued his formal education by completing his Master of Public Administration at New Haven University in 1976 and his PhD in Industrial Engineering at West Virginia University in 1985.

Dennis's scholarly contributions were extensive. He published over 85 articles in scientifically refereed journals and authored chapters in several books on industrial rehabilitation. He also served on the editorial board for the *Journal of Rehabilitation Outcomes Measurement*; reviewed manuscripts and NIH grants; mentored students who became prominent authors in the physical therapy literature; and received multiple awards, including the 2010 John Medeiros, Distinguished Au-



thorship Award for best clinical research paper published in the *Journal of Manual & Manipulative Therapy*, the 2004 APTA Chattanooga Research Award for best clinical research paper published in *Physical Therapy*, and the 2000 Rose Excellence in Research Award. Dennis will be best remembered for his leadership and expertise in the development and clinical application of rehabilitation functional outcome measures using modern psychometrics based on item response theory mathematics.⁴ Over the past 2 years, Dennis challenged a group of physical therapy researchers to publish a series of papers related to efficient measurement of key clinical predictors and outcomes. His last article, in print in this issue of the *Journal of Orthopaedic & Sports Physical Therapy*, compared the relative validity and important change between 2 disease-specific

functional outcome measures for patients with lumbar impairments: the modified Oswestry Low Back Pain Disability Questionnaire and the functional status lumbar computerized adaptive test.⁵

Dennis believed in continuous clinical data collection and performance assessment. Over the past 14 years, he was a founding member and Director of Consulting and Research at Focus On Therapeutic Outcomes, Inc. Dennis's professional vision for future research was the use of large clinical databases to promote clinical comparative effectiveness research with the ultimate goal to identify the right treatment for the right patient.¹ Comparative effectiveness research is now consistently recognized by many prominent researchers and clinicians as an important research method complementing data and results from other research designs, such as the randomized control trial.^{2,6} Dennis was the first physical therapist to develop, implement, and publish a value-based purchasing method for quantifying the quality of orthopaedic outpatient rehabilitation, demonstrating treatment effectiveness and efficiency when managing patients.³ His favorite saying was, "In God we trust—everyone else better bring data."

With this, Dennis's high professional productivity left us a rich heritage of

[IN MEMORIAM]

knowledge to be studied and implemented in routine care for the benefit of our patients. His work influenced numerous researchers and brought thousands of physical therapists both in the United States and Israel to better understand and integrate data collected during everyday clinical practice to help guide patient management and improve patient outcomes. Dennis will be greatly missed, but his contributions to the physical therapy profession will be long lasting.

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