



Sheila Clemens, Ph.D.

FIU PT's duty to veterans



Fernanda Civitella, DPT '19 (R)

Military "PT" refers to "physical training" – an exercise regimen of strength, endurance and movement to get fit for a mission. But in pushing their bodies to the limits, members of the U.S. Armed Forces may encounter a lifetime of physical challenges as veterans. This is where the "PT" of "physical therapy" makes a difference, and why an FIU professor, instructor and recent graduate are on a mission to do just that.

Assistant Professor Sheila Clemens, Ph.D., is on a multi-institutional, inter-professional research team working with amputees, including Vietnam veterans, to direct the progress of their rehabilitation from the palm of her hands, literally. She is studying the efficacy of mobile devices to help lower-limb amputees improve proprioception – sense of self-movement and body positioning – and ambulation with their fitted prosthetic.

As the team's physical therapist, Dr. Clemens provided input to computer engineers developing a proprietary tablet app to analyze real-time biometric signals from the limb and prosthetic during mobility, posture and gait assessments. "I can immediately pinpoint areas for improvement and tailor rehab techniques 'on the fly.'" Additionally, therapists can monitor progress remotely, while patients can self-monitor and practice in-home routines through the app when getting to a therapy session is difficult.

From the palm of someone's hands, to hands-on experiences, adjunct faculty and U.S. Army veteran Max Riveros, DPT, is bringing PT screening services

from the Miami VA Healthcare System (Miami VA) to student veterans on FIU's campus.

FIU Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) students, with guidance from Dr. Riveros, will evaluate the veteran's typical movements, gait and posture among other factors that could have been altered from years of combat, deployment and rigorous training. The experience should help DPT students understand the nuances of working with this patient group to present more effective recovery treatments.

Dr. Riveros believes the direct outreach to on-campus veterans can help overcome the 'tough it out' mentality that keeps many veterans dealing with chronic pain from receiving the care they deserve. "They've given everything so we can lead better lives. We want to give something back so they can do the same."

This desire to improve veterans' health extends to FIU DPT graduate Fernanda Civitella. She is a research assistant to FIU PT Associate Professor Edgar Vieira, Ph.D., at the Miami VA Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Center studying fall prevention and treatment in the older veteran population.

She credits marrying a U.S. Air Force airman for kick-starting her interest in veterans' care, but fully embraced her passion for it while at the Miami VA. "Working with VA patients showed me how selfless veterans are to sacrifice their own well-being for the protection of others."

Fernanda reflected that her desire to study PT and help people power through injury to maintain their physical independence has enhanced her appreciation for veterans. "It is immeasurably rewarding for me to give back by helping them regain and maintain a better quality of life through practice of this wonderful profession."

This HONORABLE CHARGE

INSIDE PHYSICAL THERAPY

- Chair: Mark D. Rossi, PhD, PT, CSCS
- Program(s): Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT)
- Student Enrollment (in and out of state): 187
- Number of Graduates: 54
- Graduation Rate: 100%
- First-Time Licensure Pass Rate: 89%
- Ultimate Licensure Pass Rate: 93%
- Full-Time Faculty: 9
- Accreditation(s): Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE)

Student Body Diversity:

