COURSE TITLE: Autism and Obesity: The Role of Physical Therapy in Addressing Weight Related Concerns for Children in School Settings

COURSE DATES: March 1, 2020 - March 31, 2021

COURSE DESCRIPTION: During this course, current research about pediatric obesity and weight related concerns for children with autism are presented. The barriers to weight management are addressed including the impact of medications, food selectivity, screen time, sensory/behavioral issues, and decreased physical activity opportunities. Ways to address some of the barriers and increase access to physical activity opportunities are considered. Course participants are given concrete examples of how to increase movement opportunities for children and youth with autism when they are in school, in the community, and with their families. Strategies for promoting intentional change in academic settings through the use of a school-wide wellness committee, the School Health Index, and collaboration between classroom teachers, parents, and school administrators will be explored. Case examples and successful school programs designed to address the issue of obesity in this population are utilized to illustrate the translation of theory into practice.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:
Upon successful completion of this course participants will be able to:

- describe the scope of the pediatric obesity epidemic including the current research on obesity in children with autism,
- list the barriers to healthy body structure for children with autism,
- identify ways to address barriers and increase movement opportunities for children with autism in the school setting or the communities in which they live,
- list potential school initiatives in which physical therapists may take part to help create a healthier school environment,
- understand how to write educationally relevant goals that address school-based needs while taking weight related concerns into account.

COURSE DESIGN: SELF-PACED
This online course is designed so that participants may access the course materials and forum asynchronously for the period that the course is open. The forum provides a space for course participants to engage with each other and the course instructors to consider ways new knowledge may be applied to practice.
CONTINUING EDUCATION UNITS: 3 Contact Hours (0.3 CEU)

COURSE CONTENT:
- Lesson 1: Scope of the Pediatric Obesity Epidemic
  - Weight status and obesity classification
    - Definitions
    - Measurements & techniques
  - Prevalence data and disability impact on incidence
    - General population
    - Students with a diagnosed disability
    - Students with autism
- Lesson 2: Barriers to Physical Activity and Healthy Weight for Children with Autism
  - Definitions
    - Physical activity
    - Screen time data
  - Barriers for students with autism
    - Medication
    - Motor
    - Social
    - Behavioral
    - Sensory
    - Food preferences
    - Screen time
- Lesson 3: School Based Intervention for Students with Autism
  - Functional assessments
    - Within classroom
    - Within educational campus
  - Environmental interventions and program development
    - On campus
    - In community
    - School Health Index
    - Wellness Committee
    - Community Resource Guide
- Lesson 4: Goal Writing and IEP Documentation for Healthy Weight Related Outcomes
  - Defining appropriate documentation and goal areas
  - Case Studies
    - Student “Timmy”
    - Student “Jack”
- Discussion Forum
- Post-Test and Course Evaluation

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:
- Participants must complete all learning activities in each of the four (4) course Lessons; learning activities may include viewing video recorded presentations, completing readings, and posting to the interactive course forum.
- Participants must achieve a minimum score of at least 70% on the course post-test to receive full course CEU credit.

**COURSE INSTRUCTOR(S):**

**Johanna Javens Spangenberg, PT, DPT**

Johanna has practiced PT since 1985 after graduating from the University of Connecticut. She obtained her transitional DPT in Pediatric Science from Rocky Mountain University of Health Professions. Her capstone and self-selected topics delved into autism in general and specifically autism and obesity. Johanna currently works at the Vanguard School, which is an approved private school for children with special needs, where 62% of the students have the primary diagnosis of autism. Within her school, she has delivered health promotion lectures to staff and parents about weight challenges for children with autism. She is a founding member and co-chair of a school Wellness Committee, has implemented the School Health Index, and provided data that helped attain funding for a walking/fitness trail. Johanna has authored an article on autism and obesity for parents, presented at the state level, and recently spoke nationally on this topic at the Academy of Pediatric Physical Therapy Annual Conference (APPTAC).

**Kathleen Coultes, PT, MS, PCS**

Kathleen has worked as a physical therapist since 1996, acquired her Board Specialist Certification in Pediatric Physical Therapy in 2002 (recertification 2012) and has presented on a variety of topics focusing on obesity in case presentations at the American Physical Therapy Association’s Combined Sections Meeting, Academy of Pediatric Physical Therapy Annual Conference (APPTAC), and the Pennsylvania Physical Therapy Association Annual Conference. She was awarded a U.S. Department of Education: Carol M White Physical Education Program Grant for the project “Healthy Kids/ Healthy Community Program” to bring fitness and wellness programming into a local urban community school. Among other publications, Kathleen authored a chapter on Obesity in the textbook, Pediatric Physical Therapy.