# 2027 Student Conclave

APTA Wisconsin · Session Guide for Attendees

**Saturday, January 23, 2027 · 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.**
**Bellin College · 3201 Eaton Road, Green Bay, WI**

Review the keynote and breakout session descriptions below to help you decide which sessions to attend. Attendees can attend two out of the three breakout sessions.

## Keynote Presentation

### AI in PT

**Dr. Andrew Keal, PT, DPT, CSCS**

This talk will explore the evolving role of artificial intelligence (AI) in physical therapy and its potential to enhance clinical practice, patient outcomes, and the delivery of care. Topics will include AI applications in documentation, and patient engagement. The presentation will also examine the benefits and limitations of integrating AI into physical therapy, including considerations related to accuracy, patient privacy, ethics, and the importance of clinical judgment. Attendees will gain an understanding of how AI can serve as a tool to support—not replace—the expertise of physical therapists and will leave with practical insights into the opportunities and challenges of incorporating AI into contemporary rehabilitation practice.

## Breakout Sessions

### Active Parenting: Returning to exercise and sport participation after childbirth

**Dr. Rita Deering, PT, DPT, PhD**

The perinatal period is plagued by physical activity misinformation. When is it "safe" to return to exercise? Will I "ruin my pelvic floor"? What if I "make DRA worse"? This education

session will cover the physiology of the postpartum period, benefits of exercise after childbirth, how to screen for readiness to return to exercise, the relationship between exercise and pelvic health, biopsychosocial considerations for exercise prescription, and return-to-sport frameworks. Emphasis will be placed on a multi-disciplinary care model and referral criteria.

## Beyond Patient Education: Assessing Readiness, Beliefs, and Self-Efficacy to Support Behavior Change in Physical Therapy

**Dr. McKenzie Dekker, PT, DPT**

Physical therapists routinely provide patients with evidence-based education, exercise prescriptions, and recommendations for lifestyle change. Yet knowledge alone does not guarantee action. When patients do not follow through with a plan, the problem may not be a lack of information—it may reflect readiness, beliefs about the effectiveness of physical therapy, self-efficacy, competing priorities, or barriers within the patient's environment.

This interactive session will invite and challenge physical therapy students to move beyond the traditional role of "patient educator" toward becoming intentional assessors and facilitators of behavior change. Drawing from behavior-change theory, self-efficacy principles, and physical therapy practice, students will explore how a patient's readiness to change should influence the timing, content, and dose of education and intervention. Students will apply these concepts to clinical cases and practice asking three questions:

1. Do you believe this will help you?
2. How confident are you that you can do it?
3. How ready are you to work on it right now?

A self-reflection activity will invite students to consider a personal behavior they would like to start, stop, or change and to "self-prescribe" an intervention based on their own readiness and confidence. This experience will provide an opportunity to consider the relationship among values, beliefs, actions, and to grow in wholeness and integrity by living in alignment with our professed values.

## A Thriving PT Career Is Your Choice: Managing Debt, Staying Engaged, and Finding Your Fit

**Dr. Jeffrey Ferguson, PT, DPT, DScPT, FAAOMPT, SCS, OCS**

What will your career look like five years after graduation, and will you still want it? Research shows the first few years in practice shape whether clinicians stay engaged or start looking for the exit, with some leaving within two years of graduating. That makes the

decisions you make now, about money, fit, and growth, some of the most important of your career.

More than nine in ten PTs graduate with student debt, averaging around $142,000, while starting salaries often land between $70,000 and $85,000. That gap follows you into the clinic as a steady background stress, leaving less room to absorb the everyday demands of the job. Burnout is rarely a personal weakness. More often, it's a poor fit between a person and their work.

The good news is that fit is something you choose. Passing your boards is your ticket into the profession, not the finish line, and the salary you want won't be waiting on day one. What happens next is up to you: where you practice; whether you work for a health system, a cash-based clinic, or yourself; and whether you pursue residency, fellowship, or board certification. Excellent care builds trust with patients and employers, and over time that trust becomes opportunity and income. There are also ways to keep your loans manageable while you invest in that growth.

In this interactive 55-minute session, we'll look honestly at the economics of the profession. You'll privately map your numbers, name the work that gives you purpose, and leave with a one-page blueprint for building a career where you can thrive.

**No one is going to build this career for you. You get to.**