

**Feature Commentary****JOURNEY THROUGH THE MDT DIPLOMA PROGRAM***TARUNA RIJHWANI, PT, OCS, CERT. MDT*

As an MDT clinician, most of us find ourselves at the crossroads of whether or not to pursue the Diploma Program. Going through the credentialing process lays the foundation to understand the concepts of MDT, but being able to fully and efficiently use the system takes time and perseverance. I found myself asking the following questions before undergoing Diploma training: Are my outcomes as good as the faculty discuss in the courses? Do my clinical reasoning skills work as effectively when the clock is “ticking” in my everyday busy schedule? And more importantly, am I able to educate my patients enough as to why this approach works?

While all these thoughts boggled my mind, another side pondered “Is the effort really worth it?” With a huge financial investment and time away from work, I questioned whether reinforcing a system that was already in place was worth the time. Working as the sole MDT clinician in my office, I did not have any idea about the Diploma Program nor the expectations of personal gain. I searched the web several times and the only information that came up was the official MDT Diploma brochure on the Institute’s website. Not having any information about the program and what seemed to be a huge step at the time, I had mixed feelings about my decision to apply for the Diploma Program.

When all of the pieces of the puzzle were finally put together, I began my quest to attain Diploma in 2016. The distance learning component lifted my blinders and exposed me to a whole new gamut of existing literature not only pertaining to MDT but also clinical reasoning, patient communication, etc. The list goes on! Meeting different professionals from all over the world and having discussions with them was an experience I had never had before. It opened my mind and gave me a broader perspective.

The next step in the journey was the clinical residency at St. David’s in Austin, TX. As excited as I was about making it so far, I knew that the clinical piece would be a bigger challenge to face. After being in clinical practice for a few years, we all get set in our ways and it is not easy to have your clinical skills evaluated and critiqued on a regular basis. Neale D. Walsh once said, “Life begins at the end of your comfort zone.” Indeed, this is very true. Once you establish an open mind, can take criticism constructively and are willing to make the effort, good things do happen! I found myself becoming a better clinician every week. Right when I thought I had surpassed all the hurdles on Friday, there was a new challenge waiting for me the following Monday!

One of the most important things that changed after my clinical residency of the Diploma Program was that I stopped trying to fit round pegs in square holes. It was repeatedly emphasized by my mentors to classify the patients first before trying to “fix them”. Spending those initial visits trying to understand and assess the patient’s problem and classifying them is half the battle and most patients appreciate a thorough assessment process.


Educating the patient is another important aspect of MDT and my skills in doing this improved significantly during the Diploma training. Taking every opportunity to educate the patient, starting from the history and working all of the way through the assessment process, is what gets the patients on board. They feel they are a part of the process and the assessment is worth their time and money. A

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good clinician is not the one who can “fix” every patient that walks into their clinic, but one who classifies them, understands their condition and guides them appropriately in the right direction. Not being afraid to refer them out, giving them the right prognosis and being confident to do so is what will set you apart from other professionals they might have seen! “It is not the message the clinician gives that matters but that which the patient receives” (Dixon and Sweeney; 2000).

At the end of my residency in Austin, I returned back to my own clinical practice. I found myself abreast of the recent literature, taking



the time to thoroughly evaluate my patients and getting to the right classification before starting to address the problem. I focused on making the patients an integral part of the process, being an active participant throughout and not a passive recipient. While all these changes happened in a short span, it made me realize that professional growth is crucial and is key at any and every stage of your career. The Diploma Program takes a lot of effort and mentors constantly pushing the envelope, but the rewards are worth it in the end!

While this realization dawned on me, I decided to contribute my personal experience and journey through the Diploma Program with this platform hoping that any clinicians pondering through the same questions may find some answers! As I prepare to take the next step of the final exam, I can't wait to be added to the list of MDT Diplomates with The McKenzie Institute and be recognized as a member of this elite musculoskeletal expert community.

So, go ahead, take that leap of faith and find yourself on a professionally enriching journey!