

**Session Title:****Let's Clear The Air: Integrating Airway Clearance into PT Acute Care Treatment****Speakers:** Molly Piech, DPT, CCS & Jillian Addy Tanych Taho, PT, DPT, CCS

**Session Description:** Airway clearance (AC) is within the physical therapist's (PT) scope of practice. AC is considered a basic entry-level skill that is taught in Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) programs, however, the degree to which PTs feel confident in their skills and apply those skills in the clinic or hospital is variable. In the acute care hospital setting, patients with increased mucus production and poor airway clearance can have decreased gas exchange, oxygen desaturation and decreased activity tolerance, all of which can lead to poorer outcomes and increased length of stays. It is beneficial and feasible for PTs to include AC techniques during and after typical acute care interventions such as early mobilization, and incorporating these techniques is manageable once competency with these skills is achieved. For example, in the postoperative cardiothoracic patient population, cueing for effective cough during initial edge of bed activities is beneficial and manageable to integrate into a PT treatment session. The PT's AC examination, evaluation, and interventions are valuable skills for which the PT can contribute to improve patient outcomes, decrease length of stay, and educate the patient and medical team. The purpose of this session will be to discuss AC evidence, techniques, best documentation practices, and billing codes to enhance confidence and increase application of AC skills throughout acute care practice. Complex interventions, such as suctioning, will also be explored. Lastly, case studies will be analyzed through an airway clearance lens.

**Objectives:**

1. Discuss current best practice for airway clearance techniques
2. Explain methods to incorporate airway clearance into other PT treatments
3. Develop a plan to establish training and competency for airway suctioning
4. Apply knowledge to describe airway clearance for a patient with increased mucus production in the acute care setting

**What will be the clinician/educator takeaways/skills that can be utilized immediately?**

-Understanding of current AC practice following active discussion and collaboration with clinicians

-Understanding of feasible AC interventions that can be immediately implemented into daily PT treatment

-Confidence with three key AC interventions that can be performed with patients

-Understanding of when to use AC and how to seamlessly incorporate it into existing treatment plans  
4. Learners will be able to offer resources and guidance to families, helping them understand PICS and how they can support their loved one's recovery as well as knowledge on when to refer to other health care providers.

**Speaker Bio:**

Molly Piech, PT, DPT Board-Certified Cardiovascular & Pulmonary Specialist

Molly received her Doctorate of Physical Therapy (DPT) from Saint Louis University (SLU) in May of 2019 and her American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties (ABPTS) in Cardiovascular & Pulmonary Physical Therapy in June of 2023. Molly has been practicing for 5 years as an acute care therapist at University of Chicago Medicine (UCM) in Chicago, IL. She is the primary PT for the UCM cardiac surgery and heart transplant programs, whose patient outcomes are consistently recognized as the best in the country based on the Scientific Registry of Transplant Recipients (SRTR). Molly is a faculty member of the UCM Acute Care Physical Therapy Residency and a clinical instructor for UCM's robust PT student program. Within the Acute Care PT residency, Molly leads the Cardiothoracic surgery module by providing high quality lectures and thoughtful mentorship sessions with complex ICU patients. She participates in interdisciplinary projects at UCM to improve hospital processes, such as the creation of a video about VTE and fall prevention, which is shown to all admitted patients. She is the therapy representative for the UCM Safe Patient Handling committee. Molly assists with the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) Program in Physical Therapy's cardiopulmonary labs. She is passionate about education and interdisciplinary collaboration. She is a member of the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA), the APTA Academy Cardiovascular and Pulmonary PT, the APTA Academy of Acute Care, and the APTA Illinois Chapter.

Jillian Addy Tanych Taho, PT, DPT Board-Certified Cardiovascular & Pulmonary Specialist

Jillian received her Doctorate of Physical Therapy (DPT) from the University of Vermont (UVM) in May of 2017 and her American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties (ABPTS) in Cardiovascular & Pulmonary Physical Therapy in June of 2023. Jillian initially started practicing as an acute care therapist in the Twin Cities of Minnesota where she focused on clinical education, primarily mentoring full-time and Integrated Clinical Experience (ICE) students while also helping to implement the 2-to-1 student model across the Allina Health system as part of the Allina CCCE Team. Jillian lead the Edema Therapy team, co-lead a pilot on physical therapy treatment for mothers post-op cesarean section in the Mother-Baby Unit, and created a clinical pathway for patients status post coronary bypass graft to received physical therapy services post-op day #1. Jillian was part of the Clinical Faculty for St. Catherine's University and served on both their DPT Clinical Education Advisory Committee and PTA Community Advisory Committee. Jillian has served the physical therapy profession nationally as a Minnesota Delegate to the APTA House of Delegates and two terms on the APTA's Student Assembly Board of Directors, in addition to other local committees and volunteer events across Vermont, Minnesota and Massachusetts. Jillian's research experience includes an educational session titled "From Frustrated to Fantastic: Capitalizing on Generational Characteristics" at APTA's Combined Sections Meeting in Washington, D.C. in 2019. Jillian is an APTA Certified Clinical Instructor and ACSM Certified Exercise Physiologist. She has taken LAMP 101 and is a current

member of APTA's Cardiovascular & Pulmonary and Acute Care Academies. Jillian has spent the last several years as an acute care PT at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, MA and now serves her hometown community at a critical access hospital in northern New Hampshire. She continues to focus on clinical education, increasing mothers' access to physical therapy services post-op cesarean section and advancing her skills as a newly certified cardiopulmonary specialist. Jillian is passionate about physical therapy, cardiovascular and pulmonary health and wellness, clinical education and mentorship.

### References:

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