

# Q&A With Alex Parra, Pediatric Physical Therapy Resident

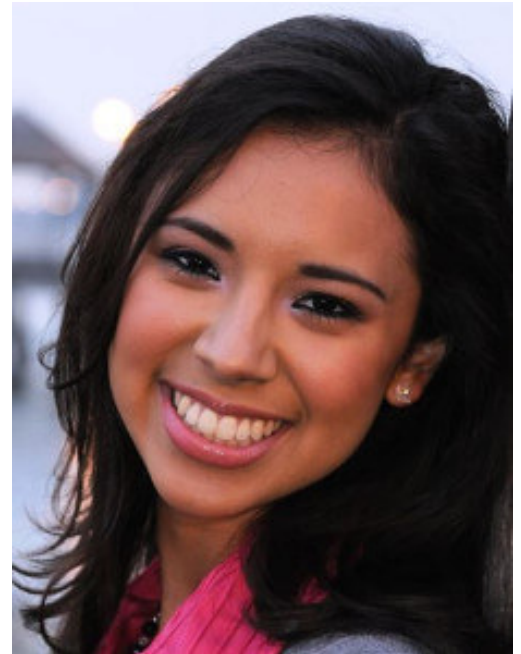
## Alexandra Parra, PT, DPT, PCS

**Undergraduate school:** California State University San Marcos; pre-physical therapy

**Graduate school:** University of Southern California; doctorate in physical therapy

**Hometown:** San Diego, California

**Residency completion year:** [pediatric physical therapy residency](#), 2017



## Why did you decide to pursue a physical therapy residency in pediatrics?

I have always enjoyed working with the pediatric population, and even during physical therapy school I knew I wanted to pursue pediatrics. When I was graduating from physical therapy school, I wanted to learn more about treating the pediatric population, so I applied for pediatric residencies!

## Why did you choose the residency program at Johns Hopkins?

When I interviewed at Johns Hopkins for the residency, I knew the program would be wonderful! The program meets all the standards of a pediatric residency, but at the same time it's tailored to every resident depending on what you want to learn and your strengths and weaknesses. The core values, quality of patient care, opportunity for cutting-edge research and application of the most recent evidence-based practices were the reasons I chose this program.

# What were your general responsibilities as a pediatric physical therapy resident?

As a resident, you have numerous responsibilities! You are seeing pediatric patients and carry a full caseload in addition to residency responsibilities. You complete biweekly didactic and clinical mentorship sessions, which vary depending on the week's module. You also have responsibilities with the George Washington University to teach lectures and labs. You will do different rotations in acute care, outpatient rehabilitation, ICU management, school setting, early intervention and an inpatient rehabilitation rotation at the Mount Washington Pediatric Hospital. There are also research and quality improvement projects you can be involved with in addition to case studies and multidisciplinary rounds.

# What was your caseload like, and what kind of patient populations did you work with?

The residency program covers all settings in pediatrics and especially focuses on complex patient management and the continuum of care. You can easily follow a patient during their admission to Johns Hopkins and then see them as an outpatient until they are ready for discharge from therapy services. At Johns Hopkins, we often see very complex patients and unique diagnoses, while still treating more typical diagnoses such as torticollis and orthopedic cases.

# How did the teaching component of the program help you become a better therapist?

Teaching is a unique experience! You learn that a lecture is not just a presentation, but that successful teaching is a form of art. You work with your George Washington mentors to become a better teacher. It has greatly helped me become a better therapist because it allowed me to learn how to clearly and precisely communicate with not only students, but other providers and while mentoring peers.

## Name one important thing you've learned from your mentors in the program.

One of the most important things I learned from my mentors is how to truly listen to what my patients and their families need. Treating the pediatric population is unique because it requires including the patient and family in the plan of care.

## Were there activities outside work that helped you make friends and maintain work-life balance?

One of the things that helped the most was the other physical therapy residents who soon became my network of support. Every month we would officially meet for different case study presentations, but we would frequently socialize with each other or reach out to each other for clinical advice. It was very helpful to know that someone else was going through a very similar program as myself.

## How has this program helped you grow professionally so far?

The program has allowed me to approach all my patients with advanced critical thinking and treatments that are based on the most recent evidence and approaches. It has also taught me to be the best advocate for my patients in many different settings. Additionally, I was able to obtain my own grant and initiate a research project as a lead investigator. Being able to accomplish so much in 13 months adds years of experience to my resume.

## What advice would you give to someone interested in this residency program?

This was the best decision of my career! It is a year of hard work, and more hard work, but most definitely it's worth it. You will grow and be pushed to be the best clinician and one who is respected in your field. I was nervous about moving across the country to do a residency, but I would do it again! People are always asking if it was worth it, and the answer is 1,000 percent yes!

# Would you like to share anything else about your residency experience?

A residency isn't for everyone, and this is especially true of this residency. Do your research, find out what you want to get out of a residency, then find the program that matches you — don't try to match the program just for the institution name. You will work harder than you think you will — even more than any physical therapy school program — but you will get out of it what you put into it.