



Sports Rehabilitation



The Origin of the Akron Children's Hospital Sports Medicine/Rehab Family

By Jessica Ciborek, Physical Therapist

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a family as the basic unit in society traditionally consisting of two parents rearing their children and any of various social units differing from but regarded as equivalent to the traditional family.

The first words I uttered to MY family following my Akron Children's interview in 2010 were, "I hope I get this job. I want to be a part of their family." I've been a sports rehab physical therapist for 10 years now, and I consider my co-workers family members. The relationships we have with each other and our referring physicians is not great, but exceptional.

We consider our patients an integral part of our family, too. Evidence-based practice guides the care we provide, and we're dedicated to helping patients reach their full potential.

The foundation of our work family started in 1986, when the Akron Children's Sports Medicine Center opened under director Dr. Bill Moats. The center was a collaboration among Akron Children's Hospital, Akron City Hospital and Barberton Hospital. The group split in May 1988 when Akron City Hospital left and [Dr. Joseph Congeni](#) became the Akron Children's sports medicine director. Aaron Galpert, Don Marshall and Anita Kapelewski were the first certified athletic trainers at Akron Children's. Mike Huth, Mike Krutel and Mindy Bragg-Coldsnow were the first Akron Children's Sports Rehab physical therapists.

Below is a Q&A with Dr. Joseph Congeni, director of sports medicine at Akron Children's Hospital. He offers a look back on the growth and teamwork of the sports medicine/rehab program.

Q: Can you describe the experience of starting the sports medicine center and what it meant to you at the time?

A: Launching the Akron Children's Hospital Sports Medicine Center with Sports Rehab was extremely exciting for me, especially at that point in my career at 30 years of age. I had seen in the original hospital consortium that Dr. Moats put together the vision of how this team could work. Then in my fellowship going to five different centers around the country, I borrowed the best of the models that I saw and eliminated the parts that did not work well.

Q: How much to you value the relationship between the sports medicine and sports rehab teams?

A: I learn more from a good discussion with a physical therapist/athletic trainer than I do from any X-ray/lab test I order. The team interaction is critical in developing the game plan. It gives us confidence that, although it may initially be hard to be sure what's going on diagnostically with a complex case, answers develop as our team gets to know the athlete.

Q: When you started Akron Children's Sports Medicine in 1988, would you ever have envisioned it evolving into the powerhouse it is today?

A: I have always believed as an athlete, father, coach and sports medicine physician that there was a great need for the specialty and this type of team in sports medicine for young people. I believed we could fill this need, and there could be great growth. With the support we were given for adding personnel, updating our facility and advocating for athletes, there was no reason we couldn't be as good as any children's hospital or health care facility in the country. Maybe that was my competitiveness coming out. The support we got as an upstart from the hospital administration, orthopedics and medical staff was awesome. They all wanted this concept to work. So I guess the answer is yes, we had big plans. It's been a long and winding road with some wins and many losses. But I'm happy about what we've been able to accomplish together as a team.

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