

The history of the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation and of Spain Rehabilitation Center have been intertwined from the very first. Spain Rehabilitation Center is a 49-bed rehabilitation hospital featuring advanced, individualized care for patients recovering from spinal cord injuries, traumatic brain injuries, strokes, and other debilitating injuries and health problems. Spain Rehab Center is also the hub of activities for the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation in the UAB School of Medicine.

In the early days of the University of Alabama at Birmingham Medical Center, rehabilitation services were provided by the Veteran's Administration Hospital. In the mid-1950s, a Physical Medicine Committee was formed at the University of Alabama Medical Center with Walter Frommeyer, MD, a cardiologist, as its first chairman. This committee worked toward the development of a Department of Physical Medicine for University Hospital and later in the School of Medicine.

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Spain, local philanthropists, had a longstanding interest in medical rehabilitation, having had several family members go out of state for rehabilitation care. In 1959, the Spains offered to contribute to the construction of a teaching rehabilitation hospital at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. When land became available for expansion of the University of Alabama Medical Center, Mr. and Mrs. Spain met with Dr. Joseph Volker, then CEO of the Birmingham Campus. As the story goes, Dr. Volker told the Spains that a rehabilitation facility was on the list of priorities, at number 10 or 12. He asked if they'd like to contribute to another building. Mr. Spain told Dr. Volker to contact him when a rehabilitation building was higher on the list. Dr. Volker thought for a few moments, and then said "Mr. Spain, I am happy to tell you that development of the rehabilitation center has just been moved from our number 12 to number one priority!" With funding from the Spains and other sources, groundbreaking for Spain Rehabilitation Center took place on July 3, 1962, and the building was completed in 1964.

During construction of the Center, the Department of Rehabilitation was formed with John A. Thomas, MD, serving as acting Medical Director and Assistant Professor, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Department of Medicine. In 1964, Dr. William Fleming joined the University as Professor and Chairman, Department of Physical Medicine, and became medical director. He served in this position until 1970.

On October 1, 1964, the first outpatient was treated, and on November 1 of that same year the first inpatient was admitted. In Spain Rehabilitation Center's first four years of operation, approximately 1600 inpatients had been treated and there were about 12,000 outpatient visits. Because of the affiliation with the University of Alabama at Birmingham, major areas of interest developed in line with the overall objectives and programs of the parent university: teaching, research and service.

Research activities started in 1965 with The Birmingham Stroke Project, which was an interdisciplinary study involving Epidemiology-Preventative Medicine, Neurology and PM&R. In 1966, an Orthotic Shop was opened within SRC.

In 1968, construction started for the fourth and fifth floor additions to the Spain Rehabilitation Center. In 1970, Dr. John M Miller, III, replaced Dr. Fleming as the Chairman of the Department. That same year, a philanthropic committee, the "Women's Committee" (now known as the Twelve to One Committee),

was formed to assist with fundraising and other patient activities. Dr. Miller served as Department Chair until 1976, when Dr. Samuel Stover succeeded him.

The Department of Physical Medicine has always had an emphasis on patients with spinal cord injuries/disorders and in 1972 we were successful in our application to become a federally-funded Model Spinal Cord Injury Center. The SCI Model System grants are given to institutions who are national leaders in medical research and patient care. That same year Governor George Wallace received a spinal cord injury as the result of a gunshot wound and was treated at Spain Rehabilitation Center.

In 1974, the Ms. Ruth Pettit Kyle created the Robert B. Kyle Professorship and Chair in Rehabilitation Medicine. Ms. Kyle established the endowment in memory of her husband, Mr. Robert B Kyle of Gadsden. Dr. Samuel L Stover, M.D. was the first holder of the Kyle Endowed Chair.

In recognition of the department's work in spinal cord injury, in 1983 we were given the responsibility to carry on the work of the National Spinal Cord Injury Data Management System, collecting data from the 17 other SCI Model Systems Centers throughout the United States. In 1985, the department was successful in applying for federal funding for that program, which became known as the National Spinal Cord Injury Statistical Center. Spain Rehabilitation Center is also home to the Traumatic Brain Injury Model System. This program started in 1987 to improve care and outcomes for people with traumatic brain injury. There are 16 such centers throughout the country.

In 1988, The Department of PM&R began a teaching residency program. Five residents started that first year, and in 1989 the residency program was filled for the first time with seven residents. Dr. Jay Meythaler served as the first program director. In 1994, the program filled with 10 residents and in 2005 the program was increased to a total of 12 residents. Dr. Laura Kezar served as Program Director from 1996 to 2007. Under our current Program Director, Dr. Keneshia Kirksey, we continue to train 12 residents annually.

Dr. Samuel Stover retired as Chair of the department in 1994. Dr. Amie (Jackson) McLain who was Medical Director, was asked to serve as interim chair. She was named Chair of the Department in 1996. Dr. McLain was of the first women chairs of a department in the UAB School of Medicine. That same year, the Department of Rehabilitation Medicine changed its name to the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, to more accurately describe the broad range of diagnostic and continual care practiced by physician faculty.

In January 1998, The Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, in partnership with the Department of Surgery, purchased The Workplace, an occupational rehabilitation facility located on Birmingham's Southside at 11th Avenue South. The Workplace provides services for occupational rehabilitation, on-the-job injuries, and also physical therapy and services for physical medicine patients. The Workplace is now located within the UAB system at the UAB Highlands facility.

Research has always been an important component of the Department of Physical Medicine. From the Birmingham Stroke Project in the early days of the department to the present, a desire to learn more in order to improve the lives of our patients has driven our research. After the departure of long-time Director of Research, Dr. Russ Fine in 1987, Dr. J. Scott Richards led research endeavors until his retirement in 2011. Currently, our Research Department is headed by interim director, Yu-Ying Chen, MD, PhD. Dr. Chen is the director of the National Spinal Cord Injury Statistical Center.

In 2003, the department's second endowed chair was created. The Women's Committee of Spain Rehabilitation Center Endowed Chair in Rehabilitation Research was created. The Women's Committee, which is now known as the 12 to 1 Committee generously donated funds for the purpose of furthering spinal cord and neuro degeneration research.

The Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation has grown immensely over the years. Spain Rehabilitation Center now provides inpatient services and outpatient services including physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech/language therapy, orthotics/prosthetics, wheelchair seating, and specialty clinics for spina bifida, transverse myelitis and stroke, and GYN services. PM&R physicians treat head injuries, spinal cord injuries, cancer rehab patients, stroke patients, spasticity, pressure ulcers, and patients with musculoskeletal issues. We have an active Rehabilitation Psychology department. Our goal is to continue our mission of serving our patients in the areas of teaching, research and service, to help those with physical ailments and disabilities lead more productive and comfortable lives.