

Learning for Life Week 6 Summary

Topic: Integrating Patient Care and Research Transforms Both

Speakers: Joanne C. Smith, MD and Richard Lieber, PhD

Many of us toured the beautiful new Shirley Ryan AbilityLab prior to sharing a wonderful dinner last Wednesday evening. Today, we had the opportunity to hear about the vision and collaboration that resulted in the state of the art facility that we saw last week. Joanne shared some of the history of the former Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago (RIC) and its prominent position as the number one rehabilitation center in the country, but then framed the talk today with the question, “what is the responsibility of a market leader?” She described a retreat that occurred several years ago. At the retreat, she gathered the leadership of RIC, including physicians, researchers, scientists, administrators and therapists, and asked them to focus on patient **outcomes**, rather than **process**. Then the team discussed “what should we call this new approach to what we do?” The word they came up with was ABILITY. The former approach was teaching patients to “adapt to disability.” The new, future state would be to “advance ability.” This became the cornerstone of the mission of the now appropriately named, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab. One of the foundational, yet extraordinarily transformational differences of the new building was physically bringing together scientists, care providers, technology and patients. Most of the time clinicians and researchers don’t inhabit the same world. Productive collaborations often depend on chance meetings. This gulf between care providers and researchers may contribute to the high failure rate of translational studies (bringing the scientific “bench” to the patient “bedside”).

Rick gave us several examples of the cutting edge research happening at the Shirley Ryan AbilityLab. We heard about the chronic pain clinic where researchers and clinicians use functional MRI to demonstrate that there is actual brain growth after behavioral interventions, and use of stem cell injections which may improve muscle contractions. We also heard about Cameron, a young man who suffered a cervical spinal cord injury resulting in paralysis. The combination of his effort and the dedication of his clinical and research teams led to an outcome where he was able to jump, run and toss a baseball to his little sister. The physical and intellectual collaboration between researchers and caregivers at the Shirley Ryan AbilityLab show the amazing impact of smart science applied to clinical problems.

Take home points:

1. There is real power in words: changing the word *rehabilitation* to *ability* resulted in a transformed concept of clinical care and research
2. Collaboration between researchers and clinicians does not occur as often as we may think. Facilitating that collaboration can lead to tremendously positive outcomes for patients.
3. The new frontier is the brain.

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