From Student Athlete to Team Physical Therapist

Monica Baker, PT, ATC, has always had an interest in sports, which is what drew her to pursuing a career in physical therapy and athletic training. She played basketball and ran cross country while earning her undergraduate degree at Southern Arkansas University. Fast forward several year and Baker was a physical therapist at Baptist Memorial Hospital-Collierville rehab center.

She wanted to match her two interests so 16 years ago, she took a class at University of Memphis to earn her athletic training licensure, taught by former University of Memphis head athletic trainer Eddie Cantler

Baker then started volunteering with the University of Memphis football program, working the sidelines during football games to tape up and ice injured players and work with special case rehabs. Because of her professional relationship with Cantler, Baker was given more and more duties working with student athletes. Starting in late 2018, Baker officially became the team physical therapist at University of Memphis, while still being a Baptist Memorial Health Care team member.

“U of M has more than 400 student athletes and until recently only had five full time athletic trainers for all of those athletes,” said Baker. “So U of M had a real need for additional help providing rehabilitation and care to those athletes.”

Now Baker runs an on-campus clinic with normal business hours for the student athletes but she still does travel to away games for certain sports. She operates as a one-man shop, entering cases into OneCare, billing insurance and providing the same documentation she was providing while working at Baptist-Collierville. The students have quicker, easier access to Baker since she is on campus, typically leading to quicker recovery times and kept appointments.

Baker mostly works with the student athletes whose parents have health care insurance with Baptist in-network. However, no student athlete is denied care because of insurance, or lack thereof.

This model of having health care professionals on site, while still working for a hospital system, is not unheard of. However, most undergraduate campuses have medical schools, with an established health care system on their campus, leading to easier access and a built-in clinic. The U of M program was based off programs at University of Central Florida and University of Toledo to name a few.

“This is a dream job for me,” explained Baker. “Each sport and each athlete offers its own challenges and while working with 18-23 years old, I have to change up PT routines more often to keep it fresh, but I love it.”

This U of M and Baptist agreement was signed in August 2018 and became operational in October 2018.