The physical therapy program traces its roots to Children’s Hospital Los Angeles in the early 1900s. A physical therapy program was started there by Lucile Grunewald, a physical educator, who was among the first women to offer therapeutic applications of exercise for persons recovering from diseases or injuries. She admitted students who already had a degree in some related field, usually physical education. Physical therapy knowledge was added to their existing knowledge base and graduates received a certificate to practice physical therapy. When the program affiliated with Chapman University, the Master of Physical Therapy (MPT) was the degree awarded to graduates. This program has always been offered as a post-baccalaureate program, a rarity in physical therapy educational programs of long standing. Chapman University wanted the historic program to continue with enduring quality and value. The program sought and achieved accreditation for the DPT degree in May of 2001, one of the first twenty-five percent of programs to accomplish that feat. Chapman's first DPT degrees were awarded in 2004.

Records at the American Physical Therapy Association indicate that a physical therapy program existed at Children’s Hospital in 1926. That year was the first year that records were kept, and five programs were listed. The start dates of some of those five programs are known and were operating during or after World War I. Historic records allow us to conclude that the program now at Chapman University is either the nation’s longest, continuous program or one of two programs started at approximately the same time. The earliest accreditation was granted in 1928, and the current program at Chapman University is the only program from the initial accreditation that survives to current time. When programs could no longer be based in hospitals, Chapman University responded by affiliating with the Children’s Hospital. That affiliation began in 1985, and the program moved to the Orange Campus of Chapman University in 1993.
Our enduring Mission:

The mission of Chapman University’s Doctor of Physical Therapy program is to foster the development of professional Doctors of Physical Therapy who are exceptional clinicians, skilled in delivering ethical care in today’s global community. Students will be qualified as autonomous practitioners, informed in evidence-based practice, mentored in good clinical judgment, dedicated to lifelong learning, and prepared to be leaders in health care.

Our Philosophy:

The Chapman DPT program is developed and presented with a guiding philosophy founded in academic rigor. The program emphasizes clinical reasoning including the ability to gather and utilize emergent data as well as the selection and interpretation of individual tests and measures. The program builds on the philosophy that interdisciplinary integration enriches, broadens and increases the depth of student development in didactic, clinical, and professional settings. The program faculty are committed to the ongoing and regular update of course information and use an evidence base to provide contemporary top-quality education. Faculty mentor students professionally, clinically, and didactically, throughout the program. Faculty strive to foster professional behaviors in the students including a commitment to lifelong learning. Each student is viewed as an individual to model the context in which we are preparing him/her to practice. Students are educated to exhibit cultural competency and ethical strength.

The DPT program also seeks to promote and advance clinical development in the profession by fostering student-clinician interaction in the clinical setting. To this end, students are prepared with the understanding that clinician instructors participate in the education process through mentoring; bringing a wealth of clinical and client/patient handling experience. Conversely, students participate by bringing currency in evidence basis and concepts of contemporary clinical practice as defined by the physical therapy professional and accrediting bodies.

1Littell EH, Johnson GR. Professional Entry Education in Physical Therapy During the Twentieth Century. JOPT Educ. 2003; 17(3): 3-12.