

## History of Physical Therapy

Physical therapy is believed to date all the way back to Greek philosophers and physicians like Hippocrates and Galen. However, physical therapy was not always the physical therapy we have now. In the early 1800's, Pehr Henrik developed the first documented form of physical therapy in Sweden. Known as the "Father of Swedish Gymnastics," Pehr Henrik founded the Royal Central Institute of Gymnastics (RCIG) in 1813 for massage, manipulation, and exercise. At that time, physical therapy was simply called gymnastics. In Sweden, the word for physical therapist was "sjukgymnast" meaning "sick-gymnast" or "someone involved in gymnastics for those who are ill."



Figure 1: Pehr Henrik

In 1851, the name for physical therapy first appeared in its more recognizable German form as "phsyiotherapie." In the late 1800's and early 1900's physical therapy or physiotherapy, as it is referred to in many countries began to grow and spread throughout the world. Universities and Colleges were formed to teach physical therapy or "physical education." These physical therapy students graduated as "reconstruction aides." During the polio outbreak of 1916 and the First World War, the practice of physical therapy grew even further. Physical therapy was then firmly established as a profession to help survivors of the disease and the war.



Figure 2: Mary McMillan

Mary McMillan, known as the "Mother of Physical Therapy" was born in Boston. She was so passionate about physical therapy that she traveled overseas to Liverpool to become one of the first reconstruction aides. When she returned to the states, she became the first reconstruction aid of the US Army Medical Corps, where she developed the Army's physical therapy protocols and taught physical therapy to other nurses. When the war was over, Mary wrote a book about physical therapy in 1920. *Massage and Therapeutic Exercise* was met with great success. A year later, she organized the American Women's Physical Therapeutic Association (now called the American Physical Therapy Association [APTA]).

Due to these amazing founders of physical therapy, the profession has continued to grow and flourish. Physical therapists are now trained licensed medical professionals able to identify, diagnose, and treat mobility problems, in people of all ages and abilities.