

B Healthy Living

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New Strides in Physical Therapy

■ When injury strikes, high-tech treatments and customized exercise programs can put you on the fast track to recovery.

By Annemarie Donkin
SIGNAL STAFF WRITER

Donna Markovich has been a registered dental assistant for 26 years. She ignored the pain and numbness in her arm until it affected her work.

"I started dropping dental instruments," she said.

Markovich was suffering from ulnar nerve damage in her elbow, a repetitive stress injury.

She had surgery but it didn't alleviate the chronic pain that radiated through her entire body.

This is where physical therapy comes in. New treatments and greater knowledge offer hope to those who suffer from hand injuries, carpal tunnel, ulnar nerve pain, neck, spine or shoulder injuries.

"More doctors believe in physical therapy," said Shelly Cloughley, M.P.T., clinical director of Progressive Physical Therapy in Valencia. "We compile and report all the information about the patient's treatment and stay in communication with the doctors."

"We specialize in biomechanics, we are very much more attuned to the body," Cloughley said. "We take care of the whole body, things that can be missed by doctors, who only see you for five minutes."

She said physical therapists have become better diagnosticians, able to design an appropriate treatment based upon the physical therapy diagnosis and more accepted as an integral part of the health care team with the physician.

Cloughley earned her bachelor of science in health science with emphasis in community health from San Diego State

University in 1991, then attended College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific to earn a Master of Physical Therapy in 1995.

Jiten B. Bhatt MPT, OCS, at the Kaiser Permanente Physical Therapy Department in Panorama City said the biggest difference between physical therapists and a personal trainer is the schooling. "A physical therapist studies the musculoskeletal system intensely, which includes anatomy, physiology, biomechanics, pathology, diseases, neurology and stages of development and life," she said.

"The other difference between a therapist and a trainer is that a physical therapist must pass a state law exam and national physical therapy board exam to become licensed in the state that they are practicing in. The license is renewed every two years."

"Another change in physical therapy is to become more evidence based," Bhatt said. "This means that therapists are applying treatment programs to patients based on literature review and research. This makes a physical therapist more accountable."

"A therapist provides treatment to help people through a multitude of treatment options (including exercise, hands on techniques, modalities (such as ultrasound, traction, electrical stimulation and laser) based on their examination," Bhatt said.

"The therapist addresses each patient with a specific treatment program and monitors them at each treatment session."

Movement is now the focus on rehabilitation, especially for

orthopedic problems. Bhatt said that as a physical therapist, it is her duty to address all issues that can cause persons problem, including posture, body mechanics (the way a person moves, lifts, carries and stands) and ergonomics (the way a person sits or stands at their work station and home computer).

Physical therapy encompasses multiple specialties including orthopedics, neurological rehabilitation, such as spinal cord injuries, head trauma, stroke, pediatrics, geriatrics, oncology and sports injuries.

Cloughley concentrates on osteopathic rehabilitation that works the entire body, not just the injured areas.

"People don't realize that pain rarely comes from the site, it usually starts at the shoulder, back or other areas and affects other parts of the body."

On Markovich, Cloughley performed an ulnar nerve tension flossing, a movement that raises the arm over the head, and a scapular mobilization, where she manipulates the muscles under the shoulder blade.

Therapies like this seem obvious now to alleviate pain and heal the body, but just a few years ago, all a doctor could prescribe would be pain medication and surgery.

Markovich said that in the past, all she could have expected under a doctor's care would likely be medication, braces and lifetime of pain.

Cloughley said the newest therapy is a low-laser light therapy.

"This laser has been approved by the FDA to accelerate healing, reduce inflammation and pain," she said.

"This is used for diagnosis of arthritis, headaches, carpal tunnel, fibromyalgia, plantar fasciitis, sprains and strains, wound healing, tendonitis, shingles and many other diagnoses."

"In many cases, we can speed up a patient's recovery from pain or injury or surgery that just a few years ago might have been permanent," Cloughley said.

Mayank Roy, 18, injured his back and neck in a car accident.

"(My doctor) told me I would recover anyway, physical therapy just speeds up the process," he said. "I was too stiff to go to the gym, couldn't move my neck to see over his shoulder and had trouble sleeping."

Cloughley increases Roy's core strength with unstable surfaces like Swiss balls and foam back rollers.

She said they engage the whole body at once to create strength, flexibility and balance.

Roy admits he would not have been as careful or diligent about his exercises at the gym.

Cloughley said she will create an exercise program to allow him to work out properly to continue his recovery and not reinjure himself.

Lorri Shipman was injured one year ago in a car accident that involved her husband, Bill, her then 13-year-old daughter, Madison and her friend Brittany.

"We were driving back from a soft ball tournament in New Mexico and we veered to



Photos by BRYAN KNEIDING/The Signal

(Above) Lorri Shipman manipulates a Digi-Flex hand exerciser to gain more strength and flexibility in her right hand. It uses springs to allow each finger to move independently. She broke all her fingers in a car accident in June 2005. Her goal is to once again be able to hold things and open a water bottle. (Right) Mayank Roy, 18, injured his back and neck in a car accident in April. Shelly Cloughley, clinical director of Progressive Physical Therapy in Valencia, assists him with a full-body exercise on a foam low back roll. With added leg weights and dumbbells, Cloughley said the unstable surface will work all the muscles in this neck, back, stomach, arms and legs to develop core strength. A new emphasis on natural movements and custom therapies are one of many techniques physical therapists use to speed post-surgical recovery, increase mobility and relieve pain.



BRYAN KNEIDING/The Signal

Shelly Cloughley of Progressive Physical Therapy applies the scapular mobilization movement under the shoulder blade of patient Donna Markovich.

Get in the Swim with Effective Water Exercises

■ A combination of land-based workouts with swimming can double strength and stamina.

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Q: I really enjoy exercising in the pool, but I'm not sure of the benefits compared to regular exercise on land. I don't have much experience with land exercises and wouldn't know where to begin. Is it enough just to work out in the water three days a week?

A: Aquatic exercise is an excellent way to work out and has terrific health benefits. Whether it is walking, deep-water exercise, toning, water aerobics, resistance training or just plain swimming, the water has much to offer both swimmers and non-swimmers.

Water cancels approximately 90 percent of a person's body weight when submerged up to the neck. This buoyancy can allow low- and no-impact exercise without the stress on the skeletal system and connective tissue.

Aquatic exercise is a great workout for people who need to reduce stress on the joints of the hips, knees and ankles. Through water exercise you are able to improve strength, flexibility and cardiovascular endurance.

Designing a comprehensive exercise routine that contains all of the elements you need for a well-rounded workout can be complicated. To decide which type of exercise will help you the most, look at your fitness goals.

Aquatic workouts can help improve strength, flexibility and cardiovascular endurance. So if progress in these areas is your goal, then you know aquatics is for you.

However, if you also want to jog, improve your upper-body strength and become more agile to run after your children, you may need to add land-based exercises to your routine to help reach those goals. Although you can improve those skills while in the water, you would also have to work on them on land — which is where you spend the most of your day.

This would not require you to give up aquatic exercise, but to

simply find a balance between the two. The level of experience with certain forms of exercise often determines what exercises a person completes. A new workout or activity that seems difficult, confusing and intimidating can hold a person hostage to one form of exercise. If you enjoy aquatic exercise and feel comfortable and confident while completing your workout, then continue to work hard, but stay open to the idea of trying new forms of exercise.

This can not only give your body an added challenge, but can also help you reach your fitness goals.

Consulting a fitness professional is an excellent way to become familiar with land-based exercise in a safe environment.

A certified trainer can help you find the type of exercises that will lead you toward your goals, and develop a workout program that includes the water exercise you enjoy along with new land-based exercise, which you also could grow to like.

Always consult a physician before beginning an exercise program. If you have a fitness or training question, e-mail Andrea at letters.kfws@hearstsc.com or write her in care of King Features Weekly Service, P.O. Box 536475, Orlando, FL 32853-6475.