



HEALTH CARE

THE POWER OF PHYSICAL THERAPY

HOW ADVANCES IN PT HELPED A SKATER STAY ON THE ICE

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A pair of blades scrape across the ice, creating cut patterns and swirls of frozen powder. Debbie Kleinman of Southern California has been hitting the ice as a high-level figure skater for more than 25 years. She performed all over Nevada and California. Now at age 55, Kleinman is amazed she can complete some basic figure skating moves. Two years ago, she thought she'd have to put on her skate covers for good when her knee blew out. Years of wear and tear to her body brought her skating career-turned-hobby to a screeching halt.

"Everything seemed to hurt my knee," which was bone to bone, meaning all the cartilage was gone, according to Kleinman. She could hardly walk but struggled to accept the reality of knee replacement surgery.

"I wanted to take a holistic approach versus doing a knee replacement," Kleinman said.

Enter the evolution of physical therapy, which has made enormous advances in recent decades. At first, Kleinman was told the only option was a knee replacement, but advances in physical therapy helped her avoid going under the knife.

"What impressed me the most was that it actually worked! I had tried so many other things, including orthotic injections and pain meds, that I felt I was at the end of my rope. My physical therapist had me doing exercises with bands and cushy balls, clams (clam shell exercises), and also did soft-tissue work. I started to feel less pain and stronger around my knee," she said.

Kleinman's hard work and determination is what impressed her physical therapist, Dave Powers, P.T., D.P.T., M.A., MBA. Powers took a progressive approach to her rehabilitation program, treating her with manual therapy, therapeutic exercises, pool programs, and ice therapy. The goal was to build up the supporting muscles surrounding Kleinman's injury.



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"Our skills and knowledge in being able to evaluate and treat patients have increased over the years. Today, physical therapists graduate with a doctoral degree in physical therapy," Powers said.

NEW MODES OF TREATMENT

Physical therapy came into the limelight during World War I when reconstruction aides worked with injured soldiers. Poliovirus, a disease that causes paralysis, was also prevalent. The need for physical therapists was in high demand, and those professionals became some of the top providers of care at the time. Since then, physical therapists have increased their level of education and introduced new modalities. This includes hot and cold therapy, ultrasound, electrical stimulation, mechanical force, light therapy, paraffin baths, spinal traction, and many more.

Virtual reality and telehealth are some of today's top technological advances in physical therapy. Virtual reality isn't just for gamers—specially designed headsets and sensors are used to program engaging tasks that can improve a patient's movement as a part of physical therapy treatment. Telehealth is used to help facilitate communication between the therapist and the patient.

Also, on the list for new physical therapy modalities, is focusing on the health and wellness of patients. This expertise helps patients transition from a clinical program to one that allows them to continue to build their strength and endurance. In addition to receiving a doctorate in physical therapy, physical therapists can now obtain specialty certification services in the areas of elderly well-being, women's health, men's health, oncology, sports, orthopedics, neurology, and hand rehabilitation.

"There are times when the mind is also addressed. Exercise programs, strength training classes, cardiovascular classes, yoga, Pilates—which can improve core strength and flexibility—are often part of a physical therapist wellness program," Powers said.

AN INSPIRATION

For Powers, the health and wellness scope of practice has a personal significance that hits close to home. Powers, who's been practicing for 42 years, became interested in physical therapy while watching his younger brother receive daily treatment from a therapist when they were children.

"Unbeknownst to him, my brother's therapist became one of my first mentors. I loved what he did with my brother and how he improved the quality of his life. I decided at a very young age that I wanted to be a physical therapist."

Powers continued the legacy by focusing on the health and well-being of his patients, like Kleinman, who progressed from severely injured to being able to skate at least three times a week.

"He was the best cheerleader, as he would remind me of where I was at when I started when my knee would actually buckle when I would walk. My quality of life is what I was hoping for and now have," Kleinman said.

Even though Kleinman can't perform at the same level she did before her injuries, she said she's in a much better place. She can still gracefully engage in her favorite sport—swirling around the ice on her favorite pair of skates.

If you are seeking help from physical therapists, it's important to make sure the professional you see is in good standing with the Physical Therapy Board of California by checking their license at <http://search.dca.ca.gov>. 