

## **Physical Therapy: The Hidden Jewel in Medicine**

What if there was a drug that would eliminate muscle and joint pain, restore mobility, and give you back your favorite life activities? And, what if this drug had absolutely no side effects? It would be hailed as a miracle drug! Well, there is such a drug, and it is called Physical Therapy. Research has shown that Physical Therapy can also prevent surgery, reduce reliance upon drugs, and save the medical system an enormous amount of money.

If Physical Therapy is such a wonder “drug” why is it not used by everyone with muscle and joint pain? One problem is that most people (medical practitioners included) do not understand what Physical Therapy is, and how it can help people. As a result, it is often the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> choice of care (drugs, time/rest, exercise, ice/hot packs often being 1<sup>st</sup> choices). Physical Therapy is the science of assessing and restoring motion (of a particular joint, body part, or movement pattern). Physical Therapy is the only profession that can do this. Physical Therapists are the musculoskeletal experts. Every Physical Therapist must graduate from an accredited Physical Therapy School (currently most PT Schools are doctoral programs), and pass a National Licensing Examination.

Another problem is that the process of restoring joint mobility, improving function, and ultimately eliminating musculoskeletal pain can involve a fair amount of effort, and in some cases a fair amount of discomfort. In the process of restoring mobility to a stiff and painful joint, there is sometimes (at least initially) a difference between getting better and feeling better. Many people are getting better (in terms of improved joint mobility and function), but do not realize it because pain is still present. It is often not until full mobility has been restored to a joint that pain is fully eliminated.

If you are suffering from some type of joint pain (back, neck, shoulder, hip, knee, etc.), I recommend trying physical therapy first. And, I’m not alone...The American Heart Association recommends that for those “individuals with or at risk for heart disease, Physical Therapy should be the 1<sup>st</sup> choice for eliminating musculoskeletal pain, while NSAIDS and other drugs should be the last choice due to dangerous side effects”. In Nevada, you can be evaluated by your physical therapist directly without having to be referred by your physician. Unfortunately, many of our patients do not arrive at our physical therapy clinics until they have seen several medical providers with no improvement in their muscle and joint pain. It is only after the true nature of their problem is assessed, and their pain is eliminated, can one truly appreciate the unique jewel that is the Physical Therapy Profession.

Dr. Parley Anderson (Doctor of Physical Therapy) is the President of the Nevada Physical Therapy Association, and also teaches in the UNR School of Public Health. He has offices in Fernley, Silver Springs, and Reno to assist with your muscle and joint pain. For more information, please call Physical Therapy Partners Nevada at 575-1818.