

## Kate Grace

Enhancing the Physical Therapy Experience

The name Kate Grace is synonymous with Physical Therapy in San Diego. After meeting Kate and listening to her passion about what she does, I can understand why. It is immediately evident that Kate's goal is to provide the best physical therapy experience to each and every one of her patients. Opened in 1985, Kate Grace Physical Therapy is located in the UTC area directly across from The Sporting Club.

Kate's interest in physical therapy came early and was due to a bad knee injury that she experienced at the age of 12. Eight major knee surgeries meant that Kate spent a lot of time in the hospital and around physical therapists. This led her to the decision that she wanted to become either a doctor or a physical therapist.

Kate is a graduate of Kent State's pre med program and Ohio State's program for physical therapy. It was her residency that brought her to San Diego. Kate had visited San Diego and immediately fell in love with it. When an opportunity for a residency opened up in San Diego, she jumped at it. Her hope was that after her residency she could fall into a position and remain in a town that she loved. It was Children's hospital that offered her a job. She worked at Children's and Sharp Hospitals for five years and made the decision that she liked the idea of a smaller more intimate practice. After her time with Sharp Hospital she opened her own Physical Therapy private practice in Mission Valley. Soon after, she opened a second office between downtown and Hillcrest. And finally, her current office in La Jolla. Kate found that it was difficult to maintain three offices and deliver the type of service that she was dedicated to provide.

Kate's invaluable business partner is Annie Fonte, who is the business end of Kate Grace Physical Therapy. Ironically it was their Moms in Northern California that brought them together. Although Kate is an outstanding physical therapist she admits, "Little is taught to us in physical therapy school about running a business, luckily this is Annie's specialty."

So a partnership developed and has been going strong since 1992.



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## Women of Distinction

Kate Grace is not just a physical therapist, but an expert in patellofemoral dysfunction (an injury that occurs at the articulation between the patella (knee-cap) and the underlying femur.) Not only does Kate Grace Physical Therapy offer outstanding rehabilitation they are in the forefront of technology with the development of the OnTrack System. This is a unique, non-surgical method for the management of this serious knee injury. Kate has a special interest in patellofemoral dysfunction since she has suffered with the problem since she was 12 years old. Research has proven that OnTrack is the only system that realigns the patella and can return the joint anatomy back to normal. Kate is proud to say that she and her team have successfully resolved thousands of patient's knee problems. Kate and her business partner Annie established OrthoRx in 1995, a research and development, and orthopedic product company. They focus on the design and implementation of needed products to help a wide variety of orthopedic challenges. Two years later Kate and Annie felt the need to add an international medical education seminar company which they call OrthoEd. They have spent the last 10 years traveling throughout the United States and internationally, lecturing and teaching health professionals about an effective and research proven way to examine and treat patellofemoral dysfunction. They spent a lot of time teaching physical therapists and physicians how to diagnosis the problem and how to treat it. This is a problem with which many people are born. It is most common in female adolescents because the pelvis starts to widen and it can cause a "knock kneed" angle of the legs. The more angle, the more likely the knee cap will be displaced.

Girls are not as (muscularly) strong at this age as boys. Often this is the time when girls are getting involved in high level sports as adolescents and in high school or possibly attempting to win an athletic scholarship to college. If the problem isn't treated at this point, they could miss their golden opportunity. The way to tell if you are suffering from patellofemoral dysfunction is usually pain in or around the knee cap. Patients suffering from this affliction will find that it hurts more to go down steps then up, and, the pain becomes more pronounced when they are squatting or performing lateral movement. This is not a small problem or a unique medical condition. One out of four people have this problem and it is often misdiagnosed. Kate Grace's other passion, and a main specialty at her facility, is her Women's Health Program. Their therapist, Sara Madigan, runs this program which deals with many issues that are specific to women. Kate Grace Physical Therapy offers specialized treatment for women with incontinence and pelvic floor dysfunction, as well as pre and post-natal care. Pregnancy can also lead to back pain, sacroiliac dysfunction, separation of the abdominal muscles, and general weakness. At Kate's facility their specially trained therapists will address the changes in postural alignment and use manual techniques, exercise, and modalities as needed to keep the muscles in proper alignment and length.

Kate is adamant about one very important element of her profession. Physical therapy is predominantly viewed as a treatment for an injury and a way to relieve pain. Kate is actively trying to

change the image of physical therapy. As she notes, "We would love to have people come to see us before they are injured. We can help athletes improve their performance and protect themselves against possible injury." So how does Kate Grace Physical Therapy manage to initiate this change in image in the mind of her patients? "We hold clinics for many different sports to help clients prevent injuries before they happen. We run classes for runners, analyzing the position of their feet and their shoes. We offer Bike Fit clinics to be sure their client's bikes are fitted properly to them to avoid unnecessary impact on their knees. We actually have the attendees bring their bikes in and we make sure they are properly fit to the positioning of their bikes. We perform extensive golf evaluations to make sure people have the right amount of flexibility and strength to perform the golf swing. Golf is the hardest sport because in other sports, such



as tennis or baseball, you are reacting to something, a ball coming towards you. But in golf you have to make everything happen. For example you need a lot of mobility in your hips to properly perform the golf turn and if you don't have that flexibility you use your back. The back isn't made for this purpose, so we look at golfer's posture alignment and teach them to correct this problem. We then put them on a program to increase their flexibility and strength so they can properly perform the golf swing, without irritating their joints. We also work with PGA and LPGA teaching pros. For example, if you get a golf lesson and the pro wants you to get your arms in a certain position and you can't do it due to a physical limitation we work with you to help you accomplish this. In this way we are working with the athlete to avoid injury, which will often keep them from performing the sport for a long period of time. We would like to change the perception of physical therapy from a place to go after you are injured to a place to go to help avoid injury."

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One of the issues that truly upsets Kate is that sometimes when a patient goes into a Physical therapy center for a specific problem, that singular difficulty is all the clinic will address. "If you come into our facility with a problem in your knee, we don't just look at your knee, we analyze the entire person." Kate believes strongly in the success rate of physical therapy "We see a patient for an hour or more. Some Physical Therapy centers see 4-6 people an hour. I can't even say hello in five minutes. There are a lot of good Physical therapy centers out there. Physical therapy works. If it doesn't, it means the patient has gone to the wrong place- not that the physical therapy itself didn't work. It is the patient's right to choose. They don't have to go to the place that their doctor suggests they can go to whatever physical therapy center they want." Their association with The Sporting Club is more than just their proximity; they offer many free services to club members including free injury screenings. They also offer free services to the community for injury prevention as well as



medical inservices to the Club's personal trainers. Kate Grace Physical Therapy also provides community education programs free of charge as a way of giving back to the community. Annie also helps to educate other physical therapists on how to run a successful business. Many patients come to KGPT after having received treatment at another facility, but have not been completely cured. They often run into problems with insurance: Most insurance companies allow a set number of visits and then they stop paying for the treatment. "We don't stop seeing patients because their insurance runs out. We do whatever we can to help them with their financial situation." When asked how being a woman in the field of physical therapy has impacted her. Kate feels it has not really been a problem. "The only area that it showed up a bit was initially when I first started my practice. One of the key things that you need to do is get to know the local doctors and let them get to know your capabilities so that they will recommend their patients to you. My male colleagues often would take

doctors out to play golf or to the ballgame, or to the bar for a drink." Playing a round of golf would not be a problem for Kate who is a 0 handicap Golfer: proudly displayed in her waiting room is a certificate honoring her for a hole in one at The Bridges golf course on a par 4! However, Kate adds, "Although my male colleagues were able to invite the doctors out to play a round if I made a similar offer, their wives would not be happy. So that curtailed how I promoted my business." Even without this method to help promote her business, Kate Grace has watched it grow tremendously over the years. She has had patients come for treatment because their doctor told them that Kate Grace Physical Therapy was the best. And often Kate doesn't even know the doctor. So even though they may not personally know Kate they continually recommend her center knowing the miracles they can work with the patients sent their way. Kate jokes, "Often we will work with the patient and make them better and they will go back and thank their doctors." Not a day goes by that Kate doesn't have a patient tell her that prior to coming to their clinic they had no idea what physical therapy was all

about. "Often they tell me that at the other facility all they did was put them on ice, put them on a machine and then send them home with a sheet of paper with exercises for them to do.

Kate is not only a physical therapist, but she is also an orthopedic physician's assistant and assists in surgery several days a week. So this gives Kate the unique opportunity to see a patient pre-operatively, inter-operatively, and post-operatively. This training and experience also gives her the ability to provide advice to patients as to whether or not they should have surgery. She has both the physical therapy and the surgical experience to be able to give her patients an objective opinion. She can tell them whether their problem can be resolved through the use of physical therapy alone or if surgery is warranted. "You can't undo surgery, but you can always have surgery, so often I advise my clients to first try everything they can

before making the decision to go under the knife."

Inspiration for Kate Grace came from her mom who always encouraged her to go after her dreams. She has also had several teachers in school that inspired her to be the best she could be, a philosophy she passes on to her physical therapy interns.

A question that I often ask successful women when I interview them is when did they feel they had succeeded? Ironically, the answer from these women is almost always the same. Kate didn't disappoint me. She responded by saying, "I haven't succeeded yet, but this year will be the best and most exciting year yet for our business." Kate's partner Annie was forced to step in and correct her on this statement. She reminded Kate of what she has always preached to her staff, Annie adds, "Every day is a success for Kate, and for all of us at Kate Grace Physical Therapy. And the reason is simple, Kate has always said that any day that you learn something is a successful day and we all continue to grow and learn here every day."

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