

Movement as Medicine

**Kourage Health Provides Renewed Health
and Hope Through Medical Exercise**



Jennifer Selman, Kourage Health Executive Director

The name of this prescription: Exercise. Since 2001, thousands of individuals with serious health conditions have been up and moving thanks to Kourage Health, a patient-focused nonprofit organization based in Tyler, Texas. The Kourage Health “prescription” is provided free of charge to those served. There is no insurance paperwork or co-pay. The program can transform lives and the side effects are great – ranging from increased physical

strength and endurance to elevated spirits and hope for the journey.

“Kourage Health believes that movement is medicine,” explained Jennifer Selman, executive director of Kourage Health. “As patients’ bodies and lives benefit from the power of medical exercise, the Kourage Health program becomes a movement in itself – impacting the entire medical community and setting new standards of care.”

The Kourage Health story began in 2001 when medical oncologist Gary T. Kimmel, MD, of Tyler, dedicated his focus to a revolutionary medical concept of movement as medicine.

“I decided at the time of my retirement that I would start an intervention. It had really never been done before,” said the late Dr. Kimmel. “Most of these patients were end-of-life, but they had one



Exercise Specialist Team

common denominator – they had a will to live. To my amazement, with this new intervention, I saw actually incredible results. There will never be a new medicine or another drug that will ever replace it. What is this marvelous intervention? It's an exercise prescription.”

A new brand, an expanding mission

Based on the initial success in adding exercise to patient care plans, Dr. Kimmel created the Cancer Foundation For Life, and its signature medical exercise program – FitSteps for Life. In 2023, the nonprofit organization unified its identity under a new name – **Kourage Health** – to better represent its growing mission. Kourage Health combines the science of bodily movement (or kinetics) with the physical and emotional benefits of courage. The result: an innovative, encouraging community that is moving healthcare in new directions.

“Our patients come from all walks of life – some are longtime athletes, while others have rarely exercised. Initially, some are too weak to walk even a few steps,” noted Selman. “At Kourage Health, what brings patients together is the fact that they're all dealing with a life-altering health condition. While every individual is on a unique journey, they form a community of support as they work to overcome their diagnosis and be more than their diagnosis. Patients gain a sense of control.”

As the Kourage Health concept has grown, so has its outreach. Today the organization embraces patients with cancer; Parkinson's disease, stroke, and other neurological disorders; diabetes; multiple sclerosis; and disorders affecting the heart, lungs, kidneys, and liver. Following a mandatory physician referral and a start-up assessment, patients may access Kourage Health medical exercise centers in Tyler/East Texas, the Dallas-Fort Worth area, and other Texas sites. Patients who cannot travel to a center – or who are limited by compromised immune systems –

now have continual access to Kourage Health's online resources and daily Zoom classes.

Why movement matters

“Physical activity and movement IS medicine because it maintains our own immune system, it maintains our own heart, it maintains our brain – and the ailments that affect all of those organs are frequently improved with movement,” said Sasha Davis, MD, medical oncologist and Kourage Health medical director.

Kourage Health's personalized exercise plans are developed and guided by exercise specialists trained in kinesiology and exercise science. The medical exercise regimens help patients build and maintain strength, endurance, and balance through the use of equipment including treadmills, ellipticals, hand weights, and balance balls. Physician referrals to the program take place ideally at the time of diagnosis, thus implementing medical exercise before, during, and after treatment.

Dr. Davis noted that although some Kourage Health patients can't initially stand or walk, everyone can do something to start moving. Often patients don't realize how far they have come until they look back weeks later at where they began.

One such patient is Joe Sanchez of Tyler, Texas, a warrior battling Inclusion Body Myositis (IBM). In his quest to defy a poor prognosis, he found Kourage Health and a medical team with a different mindset. “The medical exercise specialists said, ‘Let's see what you're



Sasha Davis, MD, Kourage Health Medical Director

TREATMENTS

doing and what you can do.' And my life changed from there on," relays Joe. **"Kourage Health has made me functional. It has given me the ability to do things with confidence."**



Joe Sanchez

Today Joe – an official para member of the United States Table Tennis Association – encourages others to never give up on hope and to build an infrastructure that propels you forward. "That's what Kourage Health does," he says. "It's given me a place to flourish in my storm."

Kourage Health's mission of movement is powered by philanthropy. The organiza-

tion receives zero governmental support or reimbursement from private health insurance, Medicare, or other health coverage. Instead, the generosity of individuals and organizations who believe in its mission allows Kourage Health programs to be provided free of charge to each patient, for a lifetime.

Mary Surber, a Kourage Health patient from Como, Texas, says: "I can't thank the donors enough for giving your time, your talents, your money – whatever you do for Kourage Health and people like me. Please keep giving, not only for me but for others who are in battles that they never thought they would have to face."

Following a diagnosis of primary central nervous system lymphoma, Mary's determined participation in Kourage Health Zoom classes brought improvement both physically and mentally – improvement that became vital as she faced a stem cell transplant. "I'm just so thankful that I had the Kourage Health exercise specialists telling me, 'You can do it.' ***I'm alive***

because they gave me the courage to take back my life."

"Our goal is to see medically supervised movement become a standard prescription for individuals with chronic health conditions," Dr. Davis added. "By enhancing the quality of people's lives, slowing down the progression of illness, and promoting lifelong wellness, we are ultimately raising the bar in community health. And that's a mission we all can put into motion."

For physicians and other healthcare providers:

Kourage Health stands ready to assist you and your patients. Please contact us at 903-561-0149 for information on the physician referral process and additional details.



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