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ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL

Exercise program fights Parkinson's



Dr. Becky Farley is CEO and founder of Parkinson Wellness Recovery (PWR!), a 501c3 organization that helps people living with Parkinson's disease through specific exercises. (Courtesy Of Parkinson Wellness Recovery)

By [Rosalie Rayburn / Journal Staff Writer](#)

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Hundreds of people diagnosed with Parkinson's disease have become regulars at a gym in Tucson that runs exercise programs designed to thwart progress of the illness by keeping them moving.

Pat Thalhammer, president of the New Mexico Parkinson's Disease Coalition, hopes the Parkinson Wellness Recovery (PWR!) program can gain traction in this state.

Thalhammer's organization is working with Presbyterian Healthcare Services to bring the developer of the program, Dr. Becky Farley, to Albuquerque.

Farley will give an hourlong presentation on the PWR! program at 6 p.m. Friday at the Presbyterian Healthplex, 6301 Forest Hills Drive. The "Exercise as Medicine" presentation will be open to Parkinson's patients, family and friends. On Saturday and Sunday, Farley and Jennifer Bazan-Wigle, the lead physical therapist at the Tucson gym,

will conduct training sessions on the PWR! exercises and techniques for physical and occupational therapists and assistants.

Exercise as Medicine

WHAT: Free presentation on Power Wellness Recovery (PWR!), an exercise program for people diagnosed with Parkinson's disease

WHEN: 6-7 p.m. Friday

WHERE: Presbyterian Healthplex, 6301 Forest Hills Drive, Albuquerque

Open to persons with Parkinson's, friends and families

TO REGISTER: Contact Johanna Sturdy at jsturdy@phs.org or 823-8386

PWR! training sessions for occupational and physical therapists and assistants on Saturday and Sunday

For information and to register for the training go to www.pwr4life.org

Farley, a physical therapist with a doctorate in neuroscience from the University of Arizona, developed the PWR! program based on more than 30 years of experience in neurorehabilitation, much of it spent researching and treating the movement and perceptual problems of people with Parkinson's.

Around 1 million people in the U.S. currently live with the disease, which is the second most common neurodegenerative condition after Alzheimer's, according to the National Parkinson Foundation.

Farley founded the nonprofit Power Wellness Recovery and opened her gym in Tucson in 2010. Since then, more than 600 Parkinson's patients have participated in the program at the gym, according to the organization's website www.pwr4life.org.

Thalhammer said the New Mexico Parkinson's Disease Coalition wants to develop a work force of New Mexico health-care professionals who are knowledgeable about Parkinson's disease and its challenges. She hopes that eventually the exercise program could be offered by physical and occupational therapists or fitness trainers in medical or community settings throughout the state.

Thalhammer's husband lives with Parkinson's so she has first-hand experience of how the disease affects individuals.

"This program offers a lot of hope and encouragement," said Thalhammer. "For too long, people have felt there is no treatment, no hope, they just go home and take pills; this is very inspiring."

The PWR! program is based on the premise that exercise can be the first line of defense against the progression of the disease, which causes movements to become small and slow. The exercises emphasize muscle activity related to posture, weight shifting, stepping and twisting, which can become increasingly difficult for those with the disease, said Bazan-Wigle.

"The therapy will help them (Parkinson's patients) move better at home and in life. It helps retrain the brain to use all its circuitry," she said.

Monica Cioffi, a physical therapist with Presbyterian, received training in the PWR! program about 18 months ago and has been using it with Parkinson's patients at the Presbyterian clinic at 3715 Southern in Rio Rancho. If patients can start on the exercise program when they are diagnosed with Parkinson's, it can make a huge impact, she said.

"It can make the difference from a person being a fall risk to not being a risk, from being able to go to a restaurant without being embarrassed about getting out of booth," Cioffi said, "It's a really charged up way to handle a potentially debilitating disease."



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An advertisement for the Albuquerque Journal's event listing service. It features a grid of event thumbnails, including one with a guitar and another with wings. A prominent red box contains the text "YOUR EVENT". Below the grid, the text reads "One listing. Hundreds of calendars." followed by the Albuquerque Journal logo and a red button that says "Add an event >".

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