

**HEALTH CARE QUARTERLY**

**FOCUS ON SPORTS MEDICINE  
AND OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY**

**Active Coloradans boost sports medicine industry**

BY DENNIS HUSPENI

SPECIAL TO THE BUSINESS JOURNAL

Sports medicine and physical/occupational therapy businesses have become creative in coping with the challenge of ever-decreasing insurance reimbursements.

Officials from three Denver-area companies talked about meeting those challenges, as active-minded Coloradans require more repairs from sports and recreational injuries.

Each company has a unique strategy for gaining profits and providing quality service.

• Renewal Colorado embraced the “one-stop shopping” approach consumers find so appealing. Located in the former administrative building for the city of Lone Tree, Renewal Colorado houses a physical therapist, orthopedic surgeons, spa, organic cafe, private fitness studio and cosmetic surgeons to complete the “whole body wellness” approach.

• Solace Health Care has carved out a niche in Denver’s pediatric therapy sector, and in five years has grown its caseload to 500 children, served by 28 therapists. It uses innovative business techniques — such as a paperless office, home visits and a web-based portal to store patient information — to cut costs, streamline operations and provide quick customer service.

• Back to Motion Physical Therapy slashed overhead by consolidating operations to one office, and guarantees patients always will be treated by a licensed physical therapist. It’s tried to shift some emphasis to preventive care by introducing clients to yoga, pilates and general exercise classes.

**One-stop shopping**

The Renewal Colorado model is one of only a few nationwide, said physical therapist Peter VanDoren of Cherry Creek Wellness Center.

“This is [one of] the only ‘building provider’ models that is offering cross referrals within the same complex in the country,” he said.

In 2007, MPG Lone Tree MOB LLC bought the 35,500-square-foot building at



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Physical therapist Juliana Doyle works with client Elana Martin on the reformer at Back to Motion.

9777 S. Yosemite St. It was renovated and re-opened as Renewal Colorado. In addition to Cherry Creek Wellness, the building also houses Bod:evolve, with cosmetic surgeons Drs. David Broadway and John Millard; Peak Orthopedics; and the amenities mentioned previously.

The private fitness studio, co-owned and operated by Oyvind Gulbrandsen, serves therapy patients as well as those recovering from orthopedic injuries.

“They go upstairs and get something fixed after a knee or hip replacement,” Gulbrandsen said. “Then they come downstairs for the physical therapy and across the hall is their trainer. There’s just great networking as far as that’s concerned. It’s the business angle of one-stop shopping. That’s the key.”

The studio also caters to the sports medicine and training needs of athletes, from professionals to weekend-warrior types. The Colorado Rapids, as well as a handful of former Denver Broncos and other retired athletes, regularly use the center.

“It’s more than just a gym,” said Gulbrandsen, a native of Norway who de-

veloped a following in his time with the Greenwood Athletic and Tennis Club. “It’s more of a performance center.”

In sports medicine, the SpeedFlex is one key piece of equipment the studio offers. The computer-activated machine can increase or decrease resistance with the touch of a button. It can be a savior for people recovering from knee injuries, such as retired athletes, who can’t handle free weights yet.

“The SpeedFlex puts little pressure on the joints and ligaments,” Gulbrandsen said.

The fitness studio has no memberships or monthly dues. Users pay a la carte for whatever training or therapy they use. Once the Renewal Colorado account is established, users can charge training sessions, protein pancakes from the organic cafe or spa treatments.

“People love it,” Gulbrandsen said. “You really get that country club feel here.”

**Physical therapy at home**

Mike Billingham formed Solace Health Care in 2005, located at 3401 Quebec St. in the Stapleton development. He started alone, working in pediatric physical therapy — but got so many referrals, he’s had to expand every year since.

“We’ve doubled in size over the last three years,” he said. “We’re one of the biggest physical-therapy, home-care businesses out there.”

Since more than 90 percent of the visits are to children in their homes, Solace is able to keep overhead to a minimum. The majority of patients are under age 3, but Solace will serve anyone up to 18 years old.

Therapists can access patient information from remote locations via the web portal.

“That was the best thing we did,” Billingham said. “The big thing is ease of use and cost. It’s very HIPPA-compliant. ... We’ve had almost zero problems.”

HIPPA, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, created a national law to protect the privacy of patients’ health records.

The web portal also means Solace doesn’t have the typical wall stacked high

with manila folders filled with patients’ records.

And while the words “quick” and “health care” don’t usually go together, Solace employees try to get back to new patients within five minutes.

“We’ve had so many referrals lately, that has kind of taken a hit,” Billingham said. “But it definitely happens within an hour. They have a succinct checklist with funding verification, checking if we’ve got a therapist who can meet their needs, checking their availability.”

Then the therapist gets to the patient within 48 hours. Many physical therapists may take weeks to do the same, he said.

“We want to have the most efficient model for getting services out there,” he said. “We also want to provide the best care. ... Our therapists come out and focus on quality care instead of administrative duties. Our heavy investment in the automation does that.”

**Staying small and personal**

Back to Motion Physical Therapy, like every other provider in the state, has felt the sting of insurance companies cutting reimbursements for claims and capping the number of visits allowed.

Owner and physical therapist Patty Pennell said her reimbursements have dropped 33 percent in recent years.

Then the recession sapped the number of workers’ compensation claims, she said.

“Those referrals from workers’ compensation dropped off dramatically because I think employees are less willing to report injuries. They fear losing their jobs,” she said.

So Pennell concentrated on what made her small clinic thrive — personalized service from a licensed therapist every time and lower overhead costs. That meant closing one clinic and consolidating operations at 616 Washington St. just north of Sixth Avenue — still near the downtown area from where the clinic draws many clients.

“The individual emphasis and attention is gratifying for the clients and the professional therapists involved,” Pennell said. “They become happy customers. We’re happy professionals, and that’s what makes a good business.”

Office manager and physical therapist Karen Ryan has been in the business for more than 20 years and seen bigger operations where patients see a licensed therapist only at the first session.

“We tend to be a clinic people will seek out because they appreciate the type of care we provide,” she said.

Now Back to Motion has four physical therapists on staff, recently opened a studio for Pilates and added the trendy trigger-point needling procedure, similar to acupuncture. Pilates is a strength-building, low-impact exercise routine that concentrates on core muscles.

“We were seeing cash walk out the door to the Pilates classes,” Pennell said.

Both Pennell and Ryan foresee a greater push for preventive care becoming the trend in coming years.

“Our practice size really allows us to emphasize that,” Pennell said.



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Oyvind Gulbrandsen, elite performance coach and owner of Renewal Colorado, trains Annie Schluter.

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