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FEATURE

Physical Therapist Authors

While many physical therapists have written books for the educational market, a growing number are writing books for the general public. Here's how some of them did it—and how they say you can, too.

By Michele Wojciechowski
July 2015

A fictional physical therapist (PT) may never be the heroine (or hero) in a novel about wizards and magic. Or spies and secret agents. Physical therapy may not play a key role in the next megahit about vampires and zombies. Nevertheless, physical therapy and PTs are emerging themes in a growing number of consumer-oriented fiction and nonfiction books with content ranging from time travel to grandmothers, from soldiers to new mothers.

The PTs profiled below are all have written books for the consumer market. They agree that other PTs could follow in their footsteps. It just takes a good idea—which all these PTs came across during their professional or personal lives—plus motivation and a basic understanding about how to get book published.

Seizing the Opportunity to Help

While working in home health, Louise Chegwidden, PT, FT, kept seeing the same problems in patients postsurgery. She explains, "One thing that was consistent was the difficulty in teaching somebody a movement that they needed to be doing themselves. With home health, you're lucky to see someone twice a week. For many patients, this was the first time they'd been given exercises. And, after surgery they were in pain and on pain medication. That wasn't the best setup for them to learn."

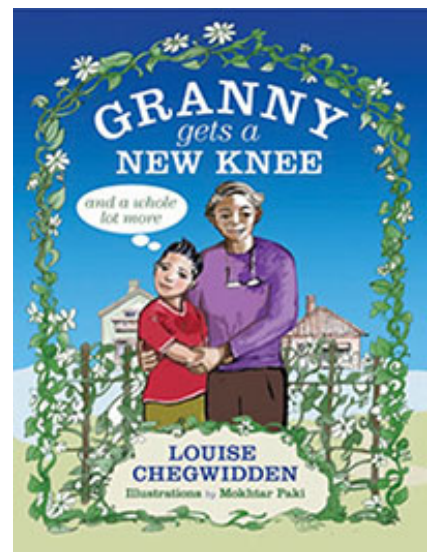
Nor was the time the patients spent in the hospital prior to surgery. "Most people were only getting 1 day in the hospital before the surgery, and that mostly was for the paperwork and medication precautions. I felt that there was a gap. We were missing an opportunity to help them learn how they had gotten to that place. A great way to start would be with the replaced joint. The whole system would be primed to accommodate the new joint and this new lease on life and mobility," Chegwidden explains.

Having defined her objective, Chegwidden wrote a first draft of a book but concedes that it was "a pretty straight-up instruction manual and kind of dry. It sat in a drawer under my computer for 7 years." Then she read *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*—it's about still-living cancer cells harvested from a patient who died decades ago—and realized she needed to combine the human story with the scientific literature.

Chegwidden reworked her book into *Granny Gets a New Knee: And a Whole Lot More*. The book is written in dialogue form from the perspective of 11-year-old Jerome Evan Sanchez, who helps his grandmother prepare for and heal after knee-replacement surgery. The book follows Granny as she meets her movement teacher, attends classes, practices what she learns, and organizes her support team before and after knee surgery. "And a Whole Lot More" refers to the accompanying instruction manual which includes the 6 movement lessons that Granny practices (plus 1 more just for fun), tips on how to use them effectively, and other helpful information.

Chegwidden claims, "The book wrote itself. The characters wrote themselves into my life. Granny and Jerome and the extended family allowed me to present the material in a way that would be more useful and would inspire by following the story of how someone was preparing for the surgery."

Of course, the book didn't literally write itself. But Chegwidden describes a process that might work for other PT authors: "Every morning, after I woke up, I'd write in a little journal. I wrote the story part of the book in dialog. I'm a professional actor as well. You bring all your best selves to the party. You actually feel like the characters are in your



room. You get to know them intimately without someone getting in the way."

In fact, she's grown so close to her fictional Jerome that he's also going to be in her next book. Chegwidgen explains, "In *Granny*, Jerome is a basketball and baseball player. In *Jerome Bounces Back*, he experiences an injury and undergoes treatment. I'll be able to bring in my experience with sports medicine and working with movement in schools. Physical education in schools can be much different than repeating movements, situps, and pushups. There's a far broader scope we can bring to school-age children."

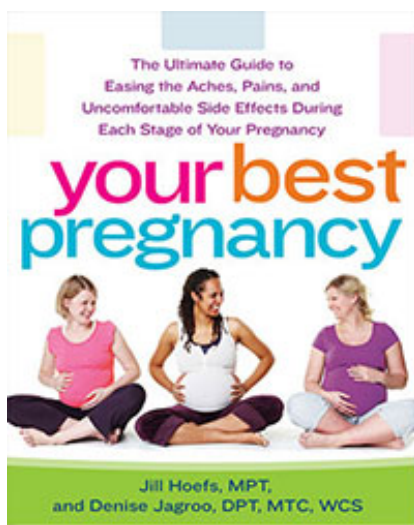
A Book on Women's Health Decades in the Making

When she was only 9, Denise Jagroo, PT, DPT, MTC, WCS, began having inexplicable pelvic pain. Despite visiting numerous doctors, having surgeries, and taking medications, Jagroo had the pain for 25 more years. It was during her last hernia repair surgery that physicians discovered endometrial lesions.

Jagroo was relieved to finally have a diagnosis—endometriosis. She wasn't being a drama queen for all those years, as some had suggested. And she no longer had to wonder "Why doesn't everyone else have as much pain as I do?"

As owner of a private practice in Manhattan—Denise Jagroo Physical Therapy—as well as a part-time physical therapist at the Department of Veteran Affairs' New York Harbor Healthcare System's Manhattan Campus, Jagroo specializes in women's health and has made it her mission to educate women about pelvic pain and what they can do to relieve it.

Jagroo and Jill Hoefs, PT, MPT, owner of Body Align Physical Therapy in New York City, met while attending an APTA women's health educational program. In 2010, they came up with the idea for their book, *Your Best Pregnancy: The Ultimate Guide to Easing the Aches, Pains, and Uncomfortable Side Effects During Each Stage of Your Pregnancy*. "I've treated many pregnant and postpartum patients who either were having or had had really tough pregnancies," says Hoefs, who has been pregnant 3 times herself. She says that often her patients didn't realize they could take actions to avoid back or pelvic pain during or after pregnancy.



Hoefs and Jagroo wondered what women who live in remote towns do when they lack access to physical therapists who can address women's health. Although neither woman had written a book before, they knew that their information could help not only these women but also others who might have access to women's health PTs, but not realize that they exist.

The 2 authors found an agent pretty easily, through a friend of a patient. Because they decided to use a traditional publisher—rather than self-publish—they needed to write a book proposal for their agent to "shop around." To learn how to write a proposal, they looked online. One weekend, the 2 holed up in a hotel room and spent 3 days writing the bulk of the proposal.

In May 2013, they signed a book deal with Demos Health, which required Hoefs and Jagroo to write their book and deliver it by February 2014. They did, and the book was released in October 2014.

How did they coordinate and share the writing duties? Hoefs and Jagroo used Google Documents to write the text together. "That was a lifesaver, because we could each work on different chapters and save them together," says Hoefs.

With their audience being pregnant women, Hoefs and Jagroo wanted to target all the problems women have while pregnant and outline what actions women safely can take on their own. "We had a lot of experts in fields that weren't our specialties contribute to the book," says Hoefs. The book covers exercise, back pain, pelvic pain, getting ready for labor, postpartum care, and much more.

They both enjoyed the process, but Jagroo says she would write another book while Hoefs wouldn't—chiefly because she owns and runs 2 physical therapy offices and has a growing family. "Finding time to write was the toughest part for me," Hoefs comments.

The authors agree that writing the book has boosted their credibility in the field and that patients are impressed to learn they're book authors. "I'm thrilled I wrote it, and I'm really proud of how the book turned out. But I think I'm a retired author now," says Hoefs.

"My goal is to be a global women's health advocate," says Jagroo. She wants to write about her pelvic pain experiences to educate and help women. "Writing a book seems daunting, but it's very doable."

From PT to Sci-Fi

Z. Altug, PT, MS, CSCS, a staff physical therapist at the Olympia Medical Center in Los Angeles, is no stranger to book authorship. A longtime member of APTA who is working on his DPT, Altug wrote his first book in 1993, a clinical manual. In 2006, he and coauthor Tracy Gensler, MS, RD, published *The Anti-Aging Fitness Prescription*. His next book, though, would prove to be quite different.

After their first book came out, Altug asked Gensler if she would be interested in collaborating again. This time, though, the book would be a children's novel that would include health and fitness in the storyline. After Gensler agreed, Altug wrote the first draft in about 6 months. Gensler then wrote her additions over the next 6 months. In 2012, they published a first edition of their book, *Patalosh: The Time Travelers*. After they received feedback from kids and parents, the pair revised the story and published a new version in January 2015.

"Tracy and I wanted to challenge ourselves with a fun project and see if we could write an interesting story that incorporates not only healthy lifestyle concepts, but also topics like bullying and awareness of different cultures," says Altug.

Written for children ages 8 through 12, the book tells the story of a 10-year-old boy from a distant planet who is living on Earth. With the help of 7 unique friends, he searches for his missing parents while battling deadly obstacles and a terrifying enemy. "Our science fiction book includes subtle healthful lifestyle tips throughout the story. Since my coauthor is a registered dietician, she incorporated interesting foods from around the world," explains Altug. "We also provide hints about the importance of adequate sleep, exercise, and stress control. Parents really seem to like this aspect of our book."

For several years, the authors approached traditional children's publishers and literary agents with their book, but to no avail. Finally, Altug and Gensler decided to self-publish through CreateSpace, the self-publishing arm of Amazon. Their largest costs came from having the book edited, the cover designed and inside illustrations drawn. "It was worth it, and we are both happy with the final product," says Altug.

Altug now is working on a fitness book he hopes to publish in September.

A Dark Comedy

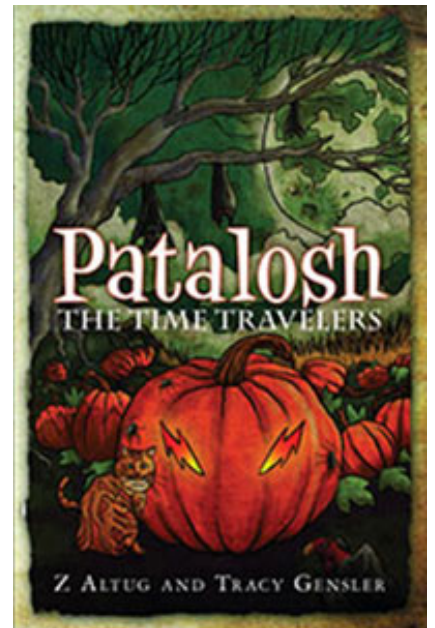
In the 7 years that Adele Levine, PT, DPT, OCS, worked in the amputee section of the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, she and her co-workers dealt with chaos, camaraderie, and unlikely comedy during the height of their caseload—when they were treating 100 to 150 military personnel with amputations each day.

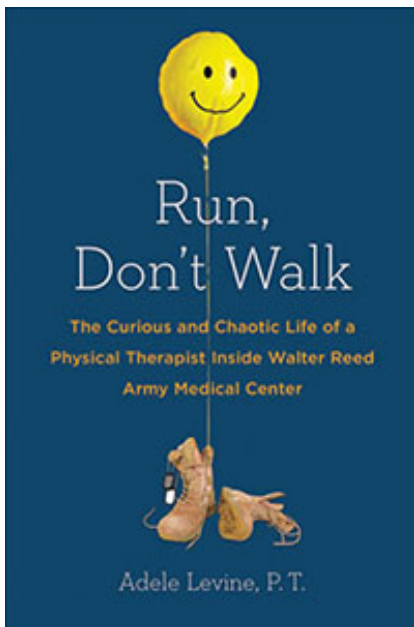
With all the intensity and craziness that they experienced, Levine's co-workers often remarked, "You can't make this stuff up. Is someone writing this down?"

Luckily for them, Levine was.

In 2014, Levine's first book, *Run, Don't Walk—The Curious and Chaotic Life of a Physical Therapist Inside Walter Reed Army Medical Center*, was published in hardcover by Avery, an imprint of the Penguin Group (USA). The paperback version came out this February. "It's about a group of very different people who came together in an unusual place, and the power of humor to unite and overcome," says Levine, who now works for Suburban and Holy Cross hospitals in the Washington, DC, area.

The book's intended audience includes veterans, people in the military, those with disabilities, and anyone who is interested in reading an uplifting, humorous book about an unusual place, according to Levine. She says she wrote the book because she wanted to remember what happened at Walter Reed. "It probably was the only time in my life that I was part of something that was much larger than me," she says. "It was the hardest job I ever had."





Although Levine was a first-time book author, she wasn't new to the writing world. Since 2007, Levine had been freelancing, specifically writing humor pieces for *The Washington Post*. Like Hoefs and Jagroo, Levine hired an agent. She learned how to write a book proposal with help from her agent and by researching the subject online. "You can learn anything on the Internet these days," she quips.

Levine met with 5 publishers in New York City, and 2 bid on her book proposal. "I decided to go with the editor who I felt was more experienced," says Levine. After Avery bought her book, Levine spent about a year writing it. A self-described compulsive writer, Levine says she got up at 4 am to write and even wrote on the public transportation on her way to work.

Despite Levine's past writing experience, she still faced some challenges in putting the words onto paper. She explains, "I really struggled with finding a way to weave a narrative thread through my book. With short articles, you never have to worry about maintaining a reader's attention all the way to the end. But with a book, you need a way to keep people wanting to find out what happens next."

While Levine says she would do it all over again, she admits that she would change 1 thing. She'd have a more complete marketing plan. For example, bookstores place her book in the medical section rather than with memoirs, where she thinks it would be

more appropriate and result in more sales.

When asked if there were any surprises during the publishing process, Levine says, "Yes. I got published—by a major publisher. I still really don't believe it."

Book Leads to Patients

When Amy Stein, PT, DPT, BCB-PMD, founder and owner of Beyond Basics Physical Therapy, was approached by a patient to write a book, she initially was hesitant. She and the PTs who work for her focus on pelvic floor issues for men, women, and children. This particular patient thought that the market needed a book about pelvic floor dysfunction. This patient would know, as she also was a literary agent.

Stein was hesitant because she didn't consider writing to be her strong suit. But the agent said she would help with the entire process. So Stein decided to do it. Her book, *Amy Stein's Heal Pelvic Pain*, was published by McGraw-Hill in 2008.

"The target audience is men, women, and children with pelvic floor dysfunction and pain," says Stein. "The book is a good introduction to the subject for patients and practitioners, and it's also a guide for a home program."

"It was quite a challenge, a ton of work, and—to be honest for everyone thinking of writing a book—it's not going to pay the bills," adds Stein.

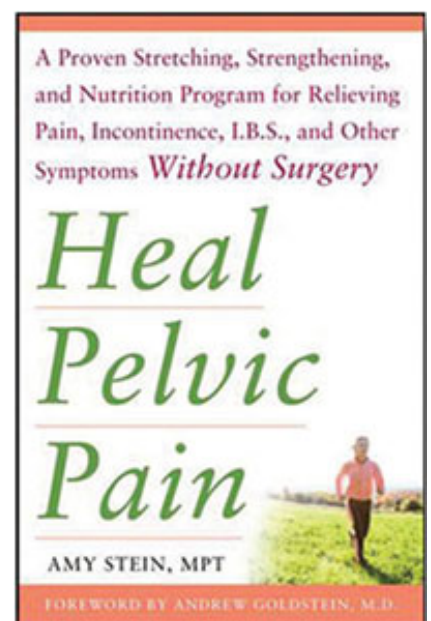
Writing the book has compensated Stein in many other ways. It was an Amazon #1 best seller. It led to television appearances and mentions in national magazines. Stein says her book has sold not only nationally but also internationally. She has received emails and phone calls complimenting the book. But it also has brought patients to her New York practice who have come from all over the world.

"They'll say, 'I found your book, and these are my symptoms. No one has identified my problem.' Or 'I've been told that it's in my head.' That is really upsetting and frustrating."

Stein began working on the book in 2006. The publisher gave her about 10 months to write it. When it came out in August 2008, it was the day before her son was born.

"Those were 2 memorable days," she says.

After Stein's book was published, patients began urging her to make a companion DVD so that they could follow along with visuals. A couple of those patients also happened to be producers who could help her create the DVD. In 2014, *Healing Pelvic and Abdominal Pain: The Ultimate Home Program for Patients and a Guide for Practitioners* came out.



Regarding her book, Stein did much of the marketing herself. She paid a public relations firm to promote it for 3 months, and she approached physicians and associations to inform them about the pelvic pain world.

"Writing a book is great for our field, and it does offer exposure," says Stein. "I'm glad I wrote my book. I do feel that it has given patients hope."

From Textbook to Transforming Society

When authors write textbooks, they typically target the classroom or practitioners. They seldom look beyond those 2 markets. Matthew Taylor, PT, owner of Dynamic Systems Rehabilitation Clinic in Arizona, however, decided to do just that.

In January 2015, his textbook *Fostering Creativity in Rehabilitation* was released by Nova Publishing. The target audience was academicians—for use in entry-level training across all rehabilitation professions—and for professionals in the field of rehab. Before he wrote the textbook, though, Taylor knew he also would self-publish a different version, one that would provide the information in a way that patients could understand and enjoy. He's in the process of writing the new version and expects to self-publish it this summer.

Taylor says that the inspiration for a version written for patients came from APTA's Vision Statement: "Transforming society by optimizing movement to improve the human experience." Taylor says that if PTs are going to transform society, then the books they write should help in that transformation. "If we can write for the patients so that they get a broader understanding of all the things that influence whatever our books are about, and then give them practical tools to make changes right away, it will shift how they understand their situations," says Taylor.

The new version of *Fostering Creativity in Rehabilitation* is written for patients and the general public, and it will be found, Taylor says, in the self-help section of bookstores. "The book is designed to give support to the person who has pile of VHI exercises from 4 different clinics and hasn't had success. I offer simple, practical tools that give the reader insight and direction, but then explain that our field is patient-centered. I want to show them that no matter what is going on physically, their situations are unique to them."

Taylor is self-publishing this book because "if I turn it over to a publishing house, then I don't build the market for additional product sales and for speaking opportunities." The textbook was his first step. This book will be his second, and together Taylor expects they will lead to further opportunities. Each chapter in the new book, Taylor explains, will consist of subsections of information that can be used as blog posts shared throughout social media. "As you're creating this entity, you can see all these other areas where you can use the content to help more people—and that's part of the transformational force that we're getting at," says Taylor.

Michele Wojciechowski is a frequent contributor to PT in Motion.

Advice for Would-Be Authors

If you're considering writing a book for the consumer market, what advice do these published authors have for you?

Louise Chegwiddden, PT, FT, says, "Just start. People, not just PTs, have told me, 'I've been thinking about ...' Or 'I wanted to ...' Or 'I've been working for years and I have this specialty ...' I say: Start. Whether it's on an iPad or iPhone, write it down or speak it. Don't think you have to write a book. Whenever you have one of those pearls—a phrase, for instance—write it down. Don't worry about what you're going to do with it."

Chegwidddden also advises: "Look at the people around you to see what they can offer. My husband is a theater director and educator. My friend is a technical writer. Find friends who can help you on your path. And write about what you know. My next door neighbor was my inspiration for Granny. My son was my inspiration for Jerome."

Matthew Taylor, PT, suggests that PT authors should start by asking themselves: "What need will the book fulfill?" He elaborates: "The book should satisfy the consumer's, not the author's, need. And address the topic to match that need. Avoid a tendency to address everything and everyone.

"For instance," he continues, "a PT might want to write about back pain. There's already a great deal of material out there. Remember: We are in the attention economy. Can you as the author zero in on a need, not all of them? For example, 'Seating Options with Back Pain: Keeping the Fun in Your Social Life' or 'Robust Gardening with Back

Pain."

How To Get Your Book Published

Broadly speaking, an author has 2 ways to publish a book. The first is to go to a traditional publisher, often with the assistance of an agent. The publisher handles all the production and distribution details and usually pays the author a relatively small royalty on each book sold.

The second option is to self-publish. Technology and a growing number of specialty publishers have made self-publishing much simpler. Nevertheless, the author is responsible for handling or managing all the details, including editing, design, publishing, distribution, sales, and marketing—for fees and expenses that can run into the 5 figures.

There's no right or wrong way. Some of the PTs profiled in this article have self-published. Others have used traditional publishers. And others have done both. Here they explain what factors they considered before making their choice.

Louise Chegwiddden, PT, FT, author of *Granny Gets a New Knee: And a Whole Lot More*, opted for self-publishing. She explains, "If my impulse was to get the work out to the people who could benefit the most, engaging with a publisher was going to involve a long, drawn-out process. Then someone wouldn't like the way I wrote the conversations and dialog—the whole artistic discussion. I knew it would be very difficult to find someone who knew with intimacy this area, not just total knee replacement—but also the way I wanted to do it. The publisher's motivation would be very different from mine. Their motivation is to put out something that will sell. And that's totally understandable. My motivation was to get the material out into the hands of people who would benefit from it."

Matthew Taylor, PT, used a conventional publisher for his textbook but chose to self-publish his consumer-oriented book. How does he compare the experiences? And what advice would he offer to others? He says, "The constraints of the publisher that were annoyances—such as timelines, page count, formatting, editorial review, and marketing department demands—become the challenges and freedoms of self-publishing. Knowing which of those constraints you can sustain yourself and which you need to get outside support for is critical. In today's virtual services world, there's a way to get what you need to self-publish. But if you don't know or won't admit your weaknesses, any one of them can seriously derail or degrade your publication."

Z. Altug, PT, MS, CSCS, also has experience with both conventional publishers and self-publishing. He advises first-time authors to try to work with a traditional publisher. "The traditional publisher provides an amazing amount of editing support. Also, the publisher decides what type of covers to create, how to format the book, how the illustrations should be prepared, and, finally, how to market the book. Perhaps the most important aspect is that the author working with a traditional publisher typically does not have out-of-pocket expenses," he says.

So, when should an author consider self-publishing? Altug says, "If a PT has a small niche idea for a book, such as yoga for seniors, then a traditional publisher may pass on the idea unless the author is well-known or is an expert in the field. In this case, a PT could consider self-publishing." For anyone deciding to self-publish, Altug advises spending heavily on editing. "I recommend putting the money on professional editing and go through at least 3 or 4 rounds. The quality of the book is in the content."

Even after traditionally publishing other books, Altug says that self-publishing was more difficult than he expected. Besides having to provide a cover design and inside illustrations, he and his author had to select paper type, font size, and book size. In addition, they also were responsible for marketing and promotions. It worked for them, however, because "We had complete creative control."

Adele Levine, PT, DPT, OCS, says she chose a traditional publisher because her vision of the book and its effect on readers could best be realized by using an established publishing house. She explains, "I wrote *Run, Don't Walk* as an elegy for Walter Reed and her soldiers. I also felt it showcased physical therapy as having a significant and worthy role in military medicine and health care in general. So my goal was to write a book that would reach a wide audience. I thought *Run, Don't Walk* had a universal appeal and that a major publisher would market it in a way I would never be able to. And they have. They did a 30,000-book print run. Since the book came out, I've received a lot of emails from college students who told me that reading it was a major reason they decided to apply to PT school."

PT in Motion, APTA's official member magazine, is the successor to *PT—Magazine of Physical Therapy*, which published 1993-2009. All links within articles reflect the URLs at the time of publication and may have expired.

Comments

When I started my own business I made exercise handouts using Polaroid pictures that were taped together and then photocopied to give to clients. For my purposes, standardized handouts didn't seem to work very well. One of my clients was an art teacher/photographer. She was appalled at their poor quality and we were able to work out a deal to redo my handouts. Another client was an author and suggested that I put my unique exercise systems in a book. Another client was a writing coach and offered to do my editing. The first few drafts came back marked up like a freshman's english paper. Another client turned out to be a book publicist and she agreed to promote my book and introduced me to a book designer for the cover and layout. A local printer was a client. He printed my book for local sales. My designer was also able to set it up with Amazon for on demand printing world wide distribution. She also help me get ISBN and Library of Congress numbers. Your client base can be your best networking resource. Mine were actually excited to help me get my project going. Some services were bartered and some were cash. It was a lot of work but it was fun and rewarding at the same time. If you want to write a book, go for it. Tell your clients what you are doing and chances are you will find someone who can help you with the things that you do not know how to do. I'm not getting rich selling my book but it is a very good tool to promote my business. People like to go to "the guy who wrote the book". Brian P. Lambert, PT

Posted by Brian Lambert -> >GY[B on 7/1/2015 12:45:14 PM

Thank you for covering this, I also wrote a book that highlights what we have to offer titled, SMARTROLLER GUIDE TO OPTIMAL HEALTH, and love when our colleagues support us. Please also check out Babybod by Marianne Ryan PT. Stacy Barrows, PT, DPT, GCFP

Posted by Stacy Barrows -> AKX[> on 7/1/2015 1:00:12 PM

This is great! Wonderful article, very helpful and encouraging. As an experienced orthopedic manual PT, I've written Your Body Book Guide to Better Body Motion with Less Pain, a self-help health care book, for the general public. I realized I was repeating my self, on a daily basis, about using ice, heat, how to exercise etc, and was scribbling illegible instructions and creating awful stick-figured drawings. Every evening for a year, I created Your Body Book; Rose Cassano created Skellie for the exercise illustrations. It took additional time to prepare the book for publishing. I chose to self-publish so I could have more control. I use the book when speaking and teaching, and am donating copies to libraries, and more.

Posted by Doranne Long -> AGWc= on 7/1/2015 6:14:16 PM

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