The Breakthrough Physical Therapy Technologies Transforming MS Recovery Transcript

(Transcripts are generated by AI and may contain errors)

Introduction to Steve Doerfler and the Foundation

Welcome to another interview with the M. S. and Autoimmune Summit. Now I'm here with Steve Doerfler, and he'll tell me if I mispronounced his name. He's the president of persevering.

One step at a time. He has an inspiring story and he's doing really inspiring, wonderful work for everyone with multiple sclerosis or an autoimmune condition who has physical therapy needs.

And Steve has his own personal journey, which inspired creation of this wonderful nonprofit. So, Steve, why don't you go ahead and tell us a little bit more about your organization, and then I'm going to ask you more about your personal story.

Sure. Doctor Wahls. thanks a lot. I appreciate being honest. And you nail my last name. So you've got 100% there? Yeah. Our organization and, persevering one step at a time is a 501 C3 tax exempt organization that was, earned that tax exempt status last August.

And the primary purpose of our foundation is to help others with MS that do not have the financial resources to use some physical therapies that have been very valuable, rather invaluable to me, I could say, and others, especially with doctor Wahls.

So some of these physical therapies are rather expensive, rather costly. And not everybody has those financial resources and they just decide, I'm not going to do this or I can't afford that.

That's exactly what our foundation is intended to help. So. Excellent. And how long have your organization been present? Yeah. We really well, we kicked it off in 2025, but we really became prevalent when when we had that tax exempt status.

But we, we have a, a website out there, dot persevering. One stuff dot com, which I think we went live on that last May or June. So is snapshot a year ago.

Okay. We went live on that before we got our our text. For our listeners, what is the goal of one step? What what would people get out of utilizing one step?

Sure. Well, our goal is to match up physical therapies, and this may range from simply using a muscle workouts to a new fit newbie. To vibration plates to cold bass.

Simply just to match them with a physical therapy or multiple physical therapies that could improve their mobility and by improving their mobility, it's going to just create greater joy.

Mission and Support for Physical Therapy Access

It's going to lead them to lead a much better life. So simply put, that's the mission of our our foundation. So we're trying to help people get into more physical therapy technologies.

Now, I think the listeners know that I have been advocating for regular evaluation by a physical therapist who can help you design an exercise program to improve your function.

In addition to regular exercise and physical therapy visits. There are some interesting technologies that can further amplify this benefit. So perhaps you could talk about these technologies, what perhaps you've had with your

experience and why?

One step is also embracing these technologies. Sure. I'm going to talk about two that I embraced fairly early on in my journey. Well, one earlier than the other, but two, they've been really impactful for me.

The first one is an endless pool, which is been absolutely beautiful for me. Made that investment in 2018. It has underwater treadmills. So the beautiful thing about that is, even if you have difficulty walking because of your body weight and water, it's just much easier and you'll be able to walk much better.

So you'll be able to at least promote that proper life, new technique. And then of course, swimming against current is is ideal. That's just been a hugely beneficial one, much more than I could envision.

The other is called New Fit Newbie, which is electrical stimulation for just improving your muscle development as well as is just making you a more mobile that I really ran into in Florida in 20 circuit 2022 through, through a company.

Well, there are physical therapy company, and I started using that and just went out and and bought the newbie ourselves just so we could have better control over that and try to use that a three times a week, and then they have another process.

Which is a reset process where you just kind of kind of calms the body down, if you will, which you can. So I got saved. So I'm going to explain the reset, process.

So the first thing I want everyone to know is when we are in the fight or fight because we don't feel safe. Our brain will make activate the nervous system, sympathetic nervous system, and our adrenals will release a lot of epinephrine, norepinephrine or adrenaline.

And so all of our cellular resources are ticked over to prepare us to flee or fight for survival. We have to have safety activation of the vagus nerve.

So our cellular resources will be cooked over to making hormones, detoxifying toxic compounds, and repairing our tissues, including repairing our brain and spinal cord.

Growing bigger muscles. The newbie has a program of tape designed where you put some electrodes on your feet, a different set of electrodes on the base of your skull, a low level current that you and I typically lay down.

This is great to do before going to bed or after a workout to shift you into that parasympathetic or vagal nerve response. So you can be in that repair state and now handed over to you, Steve.

Yeah. Well, I appreciate that explanation because yeah, that's much better job than I could have ever done it. So the the new fat newbie was good. In fact, actually, we just partnered with Mercy one in North Iowa.

Endless Pool and NewFit Newbie Technologies

Rehab, rehabilitation. They have a new fit newbie and they'll be they're getting training right now. So within probably a month or so, they'll be seeing patients with Ms.

that they can help in provide therapy too. So we were really excited about that. About that partnership. This is a new fit newbie as it is, is so does your organization help people put in things like the endless pool or get access to the new fit newbie?

Tell us about that. Yeah, the access to the new fat newbie is. And a lot of that is of course, with it being mercyone in North Iowa. It's kind of regional from that standpoint.

So we're doing like we'll have a lunch and learn kickoff here in the spring to get people an understanding of what

this technology is and what it can do, and the benefit of that and why they should use that and just availability that mercyone rehabilitation has on that.

So part of it is the education. I mean, I've realized it's more than just providing the resource. For instance, it's more than just providing them the grant to go ahead and subscribe or go ahead and make an investment on a, on a piece of equipment that will provide them greater mobility.

It's also about education. So we're we're trying to do both on that from a just from a personal perspective. But our our end goal is to provide them the financial access or resource that they need to acquire, say, acquire a piece of equipment that will help.

Now, obviously with the new fad newbie, that's that's about an $18,000 investment. That's a big investment for one particular person. I'd much rather say that we could do it in a in a regional area.

So I'm happy to work with other nonprofit hospitals that or rehabs that could do that, that would show more patients and that one at a time. Yes. And I think that is really wonderful that you're helping regional centers get a new fit newbie so they can offer it to people in their area.

And for your listeners, you should know that, yes, you can buy the new fit for, a really big price tag. You can also rent to own, so you have that access to get the new fit gradually over time.

So, certainly decreases the burden. Now, do you guys offer ongoing webinars, training where you have guests come and lecture about, their area of expertise in the physical therapy world?

Yeah, that's a great question. And to date, we have that. Today we have not. That's something that we want to wrap up into and start doing. Because again, we want to get the word out.

So it's a great it's a great area. Great suggestion. And we will shift we will be shifting to that here, I would say next the next month or two. Okay. That is really, really excellent.

Now if people want to, do you have an Instagram or any social media handles that we should be talking about here? Yeah, we have a we have we are on LinkedIn.

We will be on we are also on Facebook, but it's primarily LinkedIn that we're we're doing that. And again that's persevering. One step is to handle this to handle for that.

Yeah yeah. Persevering one step and one step at a time. Right. And then I invite you to tell your story, Steve, because I think you have an inspiring story that will give people, a lot of hope that there's a lot we can be doing.

Yeah, it's it's interesting because I was diagnosed with MSM while officially diagnosed in 2012, although I had major symptoms in 2011, and prior to that I was very active.

So active cyclist, active runner, swimmer. I competed in triathlons. Kind of was looking forward to that next. Once the kids were once we were empty nesters.

I was kind of looking forward to get back into the some of the triathlons. Loved to ski, snow ski, both. Nordic alpine water ski. So I'm very active in golf, very, very, very active.

Well, I want to I want to roll back the clock real briefly here to 2010. Son Jared was entering his senior year at University of Northern Iowa. He was a golfer.

He was set to be captain at that time. So he was really into the competitive golf at that. At that point of his life. And one of the things that it came across, I got this idea.

They have the U. S. open, the men's U. S. open at Pebble Beach, and that hole, I'd been in the Monterey area a

couple of times. That whole peninsula is just gorgeous.

Partnerships, Education, and Outreach Plans

So I said to him, let's take let's take a guy's trip. We'll go out there, play a little golf, watch the US open, one day. So we did. We played some spectacular courses and we saw the US Open Saturday, the third round, and we're just, you know, we're just he's in his element.

He's loving this thing. And I'm just following in ways run all over the course and following him. We're seeing as many of the of the, the the top top pros as possible.

The, the famous ones out there and we're, we're now kind of working our way back to, to the last hole. We have hole number 15 kind of high, one of the highest points at Pebble Beach.

We're walking down the left side of the fairway, and all of a sudden we're in this four left. And of course, immediately, you know, I'm looking up. Hey, seeing what what can I find?

And the ball is just going right overhead. It's crystal clear day, easy to pick up. Well, in that moment against 2010, I tumbled down. And so Jared he's he's laughing at me and he's running to the ball already.

I pick myself up I run to the ball and and we've got our arms out or forming a kind of a ring around there for the crowd. But we're we're right there.

And we we didn't know whose shot it was, but when he approached, we could see his grandma. Dell Graham is from, Northern Ireland. He was not leading the tournament, but he was.

He was on the top leaderboard at that point in time. So we heard this interaction between image theory, and it ends up making a really good shot because he's in the rough and we following the rest of the round, capture a flight back the next morning and the next day from from Mason city.

We watched him win the US open, which was kind of cool. Well, I want to fast forward to 2022. Most of those, that most of those events I love to do the skiing and all of that was it was in the rearview mirror, unfortunately.

But I could still play. I could still play a few holes of golf. I could still play nine holes on a good day. And unbeknownst to me and my son Video the, it was I was hitting a tee shot on my swings, kind of modified.

But if there's only is. There is one decent thing about my golf game. I at least my swing looked good. Did always end up with that result. And he he flipped it out there on, on his Twitter account and it just went viral, which blew up.

I think he had like 4.5 million views. Just, you know, it was incredible for the PGA tour. I definitely said, we'd like to do a story about you and your dad because we we really want to get behind supporting him as.

Yeah, great. Well, one thing led to another and they have a small tournament and it's a team tournament down in Naples at that point in time. I think it was a great Grant Thorton open.

And they said, yeah, we'd we'd like to have you down there as a PGA golfer that's going to be playing in this team's event that has a direct connection to MSCs.

He has a relative that has this. So he said, great. Just kind of curious who who is it. Yeah. Because PGA there's there's a few hundred golfers in the PGA.

It says Graham McDowell. I said, oh, you got to be kidding me. Graham McDowell we were right there. We we saw him. We had an interaction just a few feet away.

His mother has him. So he's started a foundation himself. We spent an hour and a half with Graham. He actually

gave us a lesson. It was just just a he's a gem of a guy.

It was fantastic. And that was, to me, the Holy Spirit speaking with me like you, you really need to start this foundation. But that was 2022. I was still CEO of our company.

Did I have a lot of time? I just kind of shoved it back. And then I had kind of another situation pop up that, golly, I really should do this. I kind of ignored that.

And by that I had a third one. At that time, I said, okay, I'm committed.

Steve's MS Journey and the Pebble Beach Story

I get this, this is something that I, that we need to deal with. So my wife and I created this foundation based on that wonderful, wonderful, you know, and I share that with you, that it's a lot of work to create a foundation, to start a work to do.

We do the trials and get through all of this. But when your life is touched in such a meaningful way, and you see in your case, the effect of physical therapy has on recovery, in my case, the effect of, you know, well, those behaviors in physical therapy have on recovery, it's the right thing to do.

So I'm so glad you're doing this, Steve. And again, to listeners, if your life is touched by EMS and you have the economic resources to support Steve's foundation, and I'll put in a plug for the research that I do, please visit Steve, make a generous donation.

It's tax deductible. You can that would be very helpful to help others. And again, seem to understand that not everyone has those economic resources to make these kinds of donations.

But for those of you who are listening to this, who do have those economic resources or are connected to people, your relatives who have those economic resources, please be generous with supporting the persevering one step at a time.

They're doing really good work. Well, doctor, was I really appreciate that because the one thing about that on our website, again, dot dot persevering one staff.com, you can make an online donation.

So we've set up where you can make an online donation. Or you can kind of check and send it to us as is. Well, we have been extremely blessed with some some nice donations to really kick off the foundation.

So I'm I'm in it. We're we're in a good we're in a good place. We still more work to do in that area. But now the work is shifting to saying, okay, we want to make we want to make grants to people that can really need it and can really use this equipment.

And one of the things that I'm running it to, and I kind of like to hear from you, is and again, I've made presentations to our support group in North Iowa.

I don't know if there's that's a little bit of reluctance or maybe people's where they are mentally because it is it is a mental challenge to get through this.

And without a doubt, when you're diagnosed with this, it's a mental hurdle to get over. But there's it's not as easy as it was for me when I because I just grabbed onto this because I was acting now. True, I had the financial resources.

But that's one thing with our foundation is we'll provide those financial resources. But I just want to urge people out there saying, look, don't, don't, don't give up hope.

You need to be disciplined. Yes, doctor. Walz's been through all this and it's been extremely disciplined. And our

approach, as I am in it requires that if if we're going to get better.

So I just want to urge everybody out there these resources are available. But it's kind of up to you. I want to kind of know your experience. And if there's a reluctance out there to give people, you know, the the point I want to tell people is and we see this with our clinical trials.

But when you improve diet and you add in a exercise program, the first thing that we see improving is reduction, anxiety reduction, depression reduction, fatigue improvement in mental clarity.

And people can begin noticing those changes as early as a month. But I would say 70 to 80%, we'll see it within three months. And then you get up to 80 to 90%, within six months for improvement in motor function.

Surprisingly, you can get improvement in hand function without a lot of change in specific hand exercises just by improving diet and physical activity.

Overall, I think that's interesting. Now, improving walking function. It really requires for most people tasks, specific exercises. And this is where physical therapy that designed, you know, can evaluate your imbalances and design.

Those very specific exercises teach you how to do them. Have you come back, check on your technique, fine tune it. Because we all it's hard to learn how to do these techniques properly when you have weak muscles, right?

But if you keep working with a physical therapist to get those tasks specific exercises going, what we see is people's gait improves. Now some people we can see big improvement within three months.

Sometimes it is nine months, sometimes it is 18 months. So I can't always predict who I'm going to see. Measurable improvement in just three months and who it's going to take nine months to 18 months.

I can tell you, the people who are former athletes and I might be middle school athletes, high school athletes, college athletes, professional athletes, the people who have some athletic history are the ones who seem to understand that exercise matters.

And doing it every day on a routine training, like an athlete.

Building the Foundation and Encouraging Hope

Even though you're now a patient, will make all the difference in the world to your being able to improve your motor function, whether it's your hand function, we're talking about your back and torso function or your walking function.

And Steve's doing a wonderful thing, trying to get more newbies into more centers to help people access a variety of physical therapy technologies. Your contribution as an individual, if you can make the fine your inner athlete, grow your inner athlete right?

And it's okay if it starts out, you know, when I started, it was a ten minute tiny little tiny, tiny, itsy bitsy tiny. It's it's itsy bitsy little workout. Yeah.

But I was doing very simple little stuff that my physical therapist had me doing very slowly, very precisely. That grew over time. And, you know, and now I'm lifting weights and I am jogging.

I'm doing impact training. It took a long, long, long time to get to that. I got my biking fairly quickly, but took a long time to get to jogging. Oh, I bet it did.

I bet it did. 15 years. Right. But. But you're jogging and that fast. But I am jogging and I'm so excited about that. Oh, that's that's terribly exciting.

Do that. When something that you think is going to be taken away from you forever to to get back, regardless of

what, how long it is or what he's you know it.

And I'll tell everyone I was joy you in my, neighborhood. I really enjoyed that. I love the breeze. And then I stumbled, broke my wrist, and I wanted to go back out, join you in the neighborhood again.

After I got my cast, my neurologist said, no, Terry, I know you really like jogging in the neighborhood, but I would rather you jog on your treadmill and not stumble.

Yeah, you catch yourself, right? And so I said, I'll do that all winter long. And then spring came and I realized, you know what? Not stumbling is worth a lot.

So I'm still jogging. I'm still a giant on my treadmill because I could do it. That jogging is is worth a lot. So yeah, one of the things I just want to impress upon your on your viewers here is we offer a half a dozen physical therapies.

We're adding, actually, we're adding one year. I think we're up to like seven. And these are all therapies, by the way, that I've tried or or I continue to use.

So they're, they're proven from, from my standpoint. So we have from sciatic from the newbie to to Ms. workouts in terms of providing a subscription to that.

And so that's a virtual exercise program that you could take. Yeah. It's yeah, yeah, it's a virtual exercise program where the experts, they understand Ms..

They put together their physical therapist. They put together a program of exercising by using bands either stand up or sit down. And it's stretching based on the same thing to, to the sciatic nerve sleeves, which your for your legs that activate, activate four main areas that can activate your, your quads, your hamstring, your calves.

So shins. It has a built in Built-In electrical stimulation. It helps you think of has an orthotic to help with the form of your walking. That's very helpful.

It's not quite as good at, building muscle strength. It's not quite as good at building nerve growth factors in your brain. So I like it. I've used it.

Or if, you know, I've tested it, in a, medical conference. That was super interesting. So. Yeah. So it can be a very helpful technology. Well, I like the, I like the newbie better from a standpoint of you can exercise more muscle groups as well.

From their standpoint. And if you, your in your listeners out there were active cyclist or like to cycle but they can no longer cycle or they haven't cycled.

I have a hand side and it's absolutely because I want to trust me, I have slowness. That's that's pretty bad. I would Tucker out very fast, even if I was comfortable with the balance of of a bike.

So I have a hand cycle. It's a tricycle and it's got me back on the trails. And mentally that can that can mean so much. You just get back home. That is wonderful.

We want to get people out exercising again. That is just very powerful. Yeah. And those are not inexpensive cycles. They're there probably anywhere from five 5 to 8000.

But again if somebody is saying to would apply to the foundation saying, look, I, I was I love cycling, I miss it, I want to do this. We we'd be very serious about granting them a cycle there.

So again, I want to make sure your listeners know that we're not just honed into 1 or 2 different areas, even if they just want a cold bath, if they want a cold bath, what if you want a chiller to the cold bath?

So the invest what you know, roughly around 1215 hundred total for that. Again the foundation tend to look at that particular ground and evaluate it. But yes we we would support something like that.

Wonderful. Well, Steve, this has been a terrific conversation. I'm sure our listeners have been inspired by, your story and what you have to offer one more time.

Tell people how to find your organization. Yes, one more time. It's WW dot persevering. One step. It's all one word persevering. One step. All one word.com.

Or you can just do a Google search on persevering one step at a time Foundation. It'll it'll pop up there. And we'd love to have you on the website. And if you could subscribe to us, you can shoot me an email with any questions.

My email is is Steve D at persevering One-Step dot com. And that'll be right on the on the website as well. I'd love to hear from you. Love to see if we can.

The foundation can help you out and stay immobile by friends. All right. Thank you so much for being a part of our summit. Thanks a lot, Doctor Wahls.

I really appreciate, I really appreciate this opportunity.