

## **RESEARCH SHOWS PHYSICAL THERAPY TREATMENT RESOLVES SYMPTOMS OF URINARY INCONTINENCE IN WOMEN**

*Silent Health Issue Affects Substantial Proportion of American Women,  
According to JAMA*

Austin, Texas, September 29, 2008 — In response to a new study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* showing that pelvic floor disorders, such as urinary and fecal incontinence, affect up to one-quarter of American women, the American Physical Therapy Association's (APTA's) Section on Women's Health is urging women who experience pelvic floor disorders to consider examination and treatment from a physical therapist.

Recent research has demonstrated physical therapy's effectiveness at treating the symptoms of urinary incontinence. A study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* (March 18, 2008) reports that pelvic floor muscle training, in conjunction with bladder training, resolved the symptoms of urinary incontinence in women. According to APTA, proper preventive measures and examination and treatment by a physical therapist can help patients manage, if not alleviate, this often debilitating condition.

The study, which included 96 randomized controlled trials and 3 systematic reviews from 1990 through 2007, concluded that pelvic floor muscles training and bladder training resolved urinary incontinence in women, as compared to drug therapy, electrostimulation, medical devices, injectable bulking agents, and local estrogen therapy.

"*The Annals of Internal Medicine* study is significant for many reasons, none more so than because it provides the highest levels of evidence to support the importance of intervention by a physical therapist who specializes in treating urinary incontinence," says Kimberlee, Sullivan, DPT, Owner of Sullivan Physical Therapy and APTA Section on Women's Health member.

Urinary incontinence, or involuntary loss of bladder control, isn't something that just happens to older patients. In fact, the condition affects men and women alike, young and old. More than 25 million\* Americans have urinary incontinence, and the experience can leave them feeling ashamed, socially isolated, and depressed.

In a case study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (March 6, 2008) regarding urinary incontinence in women, it is noted that "first-line treatment for stress incontinence includes pelvic floor muscle training." Affirming the *Annals of Internal Medicine* results, this second study points out that women unable to identify their pelvic floor muscles "may benefit from seeing a physical therapist trained in pelvic floor therapy."

Kegel exercises, or pelvic floor muscle exercises that involve contracting, holding, and releasing pelvic floor muscles, are the most effective weapon in the fight against stress incontinence. Once patients have correctly identified these muscles, a physical therapist

will train them how to enhance pelvic floor muscle function, coordinate with abdominal muscle exercises and bring these exercises and awareness into functional activities. These exercises can be done when sitting at your desk or on the toilet, while driving, or at the gym. For those with very weak muscles, consider starting the exercises while lying down. Physical therapists can also offer tips on lifestyle changes that will help make the bladder less irritable: avoiding common bladder irritants, retraining the bladder, keeping a bladder diary and lifting, moving, and exercising correctly, particularly by avoiding improper sit-up techniques.

Since 2006, the Section has offered members a Certificate of Achievement in Pelvic Physical Therapy (CAPP). Known as CAPP, the program provides standardized training for this highly specialized field and currently has 400 members in the certification process.

APTA offers a free brochure to help consumers understand what incontinence is and the different kinds of treatment options physical therapists can provide to manage the condition, or in some cases, regain complete continence. It can be found on the APTA Web site at [www.apta.org/consumer](http://www.apta.org/consumer).

Physical therapists are health care professionals who diagnose and manage individuals of all ages who have musculoskeletal problems or other health-related conditions that limit their abilities to move and perform functional activities in their daily lives. Physical therapists examine each individual and develop a plan of care using treatment techniques to promote the ability to move, reduce pain, restore function, and prevent disability. Physical therapists also work with individuals to prevent the loss of mobility by developing fitness- and wellness-oriented programs for healthier and more active lifestyles.

Sullivan Physical Therapy specializes in women's and men's health and is located in Northwest Austin. The goal of Sullivan Physical Therapy is to provide comprehensive care that encompasses strategies and interventions to promote and advance the health in women and men of all ages. Sullivan Physical Therapy offers physical therapists with advanced training in women's and men's health who are specialized in evaluating and treating the low back, pelvis and pelvic floor region. They offer high quality and personalized health care to each patient and their family. Each physical therapy appointment is one-on-one with a physical therapist. As a result, they offer individualized treatment plans for each patient designed around the diagnosis and patient's goals. For more information on Sullivan Physical Therapy, visit [www.sullivanphysicaltherapy.com](http://www.sullivanphysicaltherapy.com).

\* National Association for Continence (NAFC)