

SUMMIT ON AGING & INDEPENDENCE · SEPTEMBER 30, 2026

Movement Is Medicine. Movement Is Independence.

Confronting the system that under-doses movement in older adults

Dana Robbins, PT, DPT

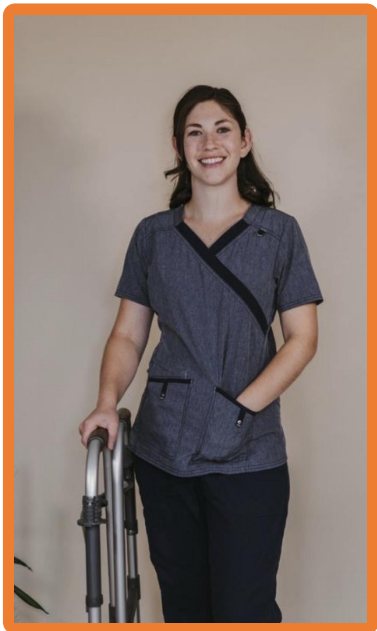
Founder and Executive Director

Home and Happy Inc.

@drdanadpt

ABOUT ME

Dana Robbins, PT, DPT



Doctor of Physical Therapy
Founder and Executive Director, Home and Happy Inc.
Owner of Buffalo Health and Fitness



Duquesne University

Bachelor of Science | Biology and Health Science | 2017
Doctor of Physical Therapy | 2019



Started my career in nursing homes

Working across facilities during COVID showed me the gaps in care



Founded Home and Happy in 2022

Helping older adults in Erie and Niagara County age in place



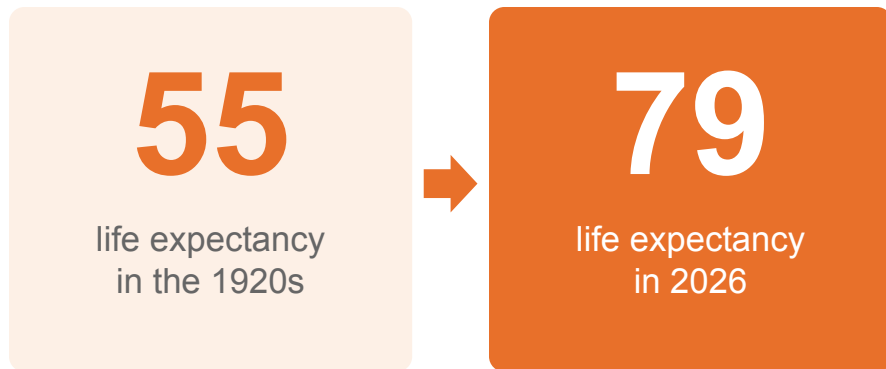
Buffalo Health and Fitness in 2024

Cash-based setting working one on one with women and the aging population

Five questions we will work through today

- 1 Are we taking too much medication?
- 2 What about movement prescriptions?
- 3 Are physical therapists under-dosing?
- 4 How does the system fail older adults?
- 5 **So... what should we do?**

Medication saves lives and helped push U.S. lifespan from 55 to 79



What we can't control

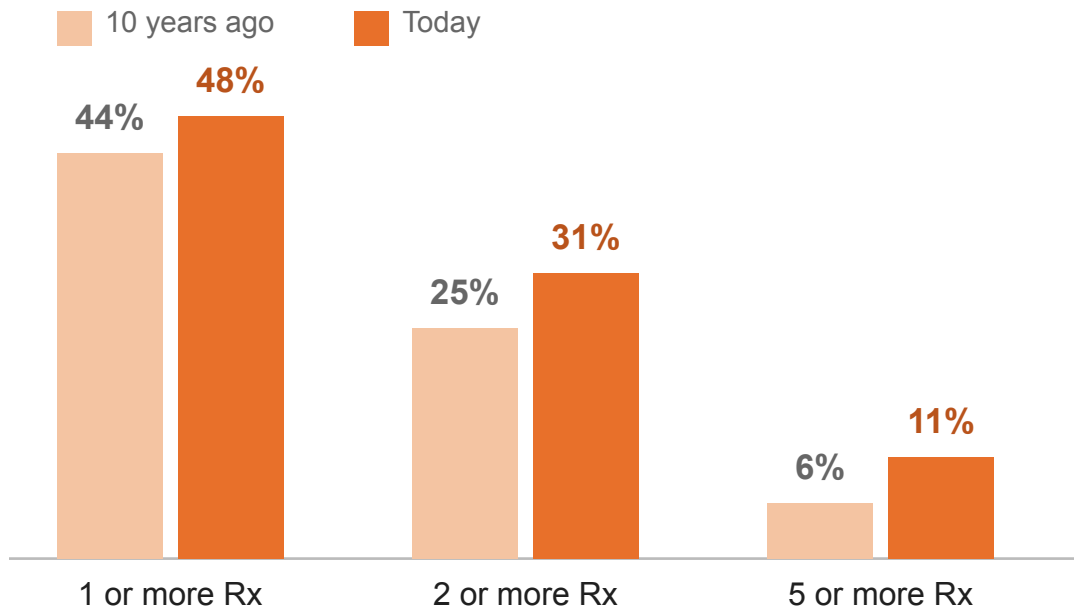
Chronic disease, trauma, cancer, genetics

What we can

Decrease our risk factors through movement and diet

As a society, we have grown used to the “quick fix” of a pill.

Americans on 5+ prescriptions nearly doubled in ten years, from 6% to 11%



Share of U.S. adults taking prescription drugs

+13%

increase in the daily dose of prescription medicine over the past 5 years

Prescribing is starting earlier and increasingly runs on autopilot



92M+

U.S. adults take a statin for high cholesterol (hyperlipidemia)



30s–40s

AHA guidelines now weigh lifetime cardiovascular risk over decades, not a 10-year window, encouraging earlier prescriptions



~6×

higher prescription rates with automated pharmacy referrals, as at Penn Medicine

Is this good or bad?

38%

higher mortality among older adults who take 5 or more medications

+7%

additional increase in mortality for every medication after the fifth

Doctors call lifestyle change the first line of defense, yet rarely write the script for it



“Our first line of defense is behavior change: movement and diet.”

So how often is a script actually written for a physical therapist or a dietitian?

Exercise meaningfully improves high cholesterol, high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes with minimal side effects, especially when supervised by a PT.

14 systematic reviews show exercise improves all three metabolic conditions



5

reviews

Hypertension

Significant acute and long-term improvement, from light to vigorous exercise



3

reviews

Hyperlipidemia

Better total cholesterol, LDL, HDL and triglycerides across exercise types, including in menopausal women



6

reviews

Type 2 diabetes

Improved insulin tolerance and overall blood sugar regulation

Higher intensity and consistency produce the biggest improvements

Almost every intensity and duration of exercise improves the numbers. The strongest results come from exercise that is:



Higher intensity



Consistent over time

THE BONUS OF HEAVIER LOADS

- **Bone density**
- **Muscle mass**

Two more variables that shape both the quality and the quantity of life.

PT's can do what?

Physical Therapists can be used for more than just pain.

68%-72%

patients reported PT delivered substantial benefits.

PTs under-load older adults by about 2 lb below what muscles need to adapt

We help older adults get comfortable with exercise

through education on managing pain and other diagnoses.

But are we doing everything we can?

Neuroplasticity and hypertrophy don't discriminate by age. Do we?



~2 lb

average shortfall below the load
needed for muscular adaptation

Five pressures push therapists to under-dose



“Playing it safe”



**Fear of legal
action**



**Pushback from
patient or family**



High caseloads



A fragility mindset

Is our under-dosing why medication is over-prescribed, or is over-prescription the reason we under-dose?

Medicare's therapy threshold hasn't been reviewed since 1997, and a missing comma still shapes it

The 1997 draft listed the disciplines without a comma between two of them, so PT and SLP were grouped together:

PT + SLP

\$2,480

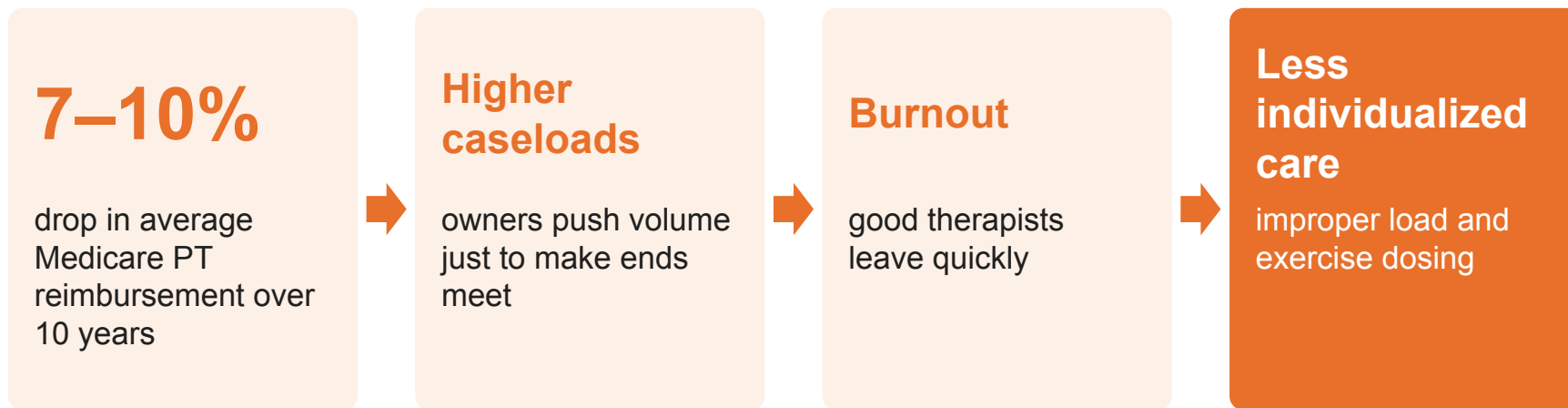
one combined Medicare threshold per year

OT

\$2,480

its own threshold

Falling Medicare rates are turning clinics into “PT mills”



The result: “PT mills,” where volume replaces individualized, properly dosed care.

Medicare home care is shrinking: fewer visits, and many referrals never arrive



10.5 → 8.6

average visits per home, 2017 to 2022



Up to 1 in 3

patients never receive home services despite a referral

Will this change within the year?

By 2030, 1 in 5 Americans will be 65 or older, and they need skilled providers

20%

of the U.S. population will be
65+ by 2030

What is a skilled provider?

A physical therapist is one example: someone who has...



Accredited education

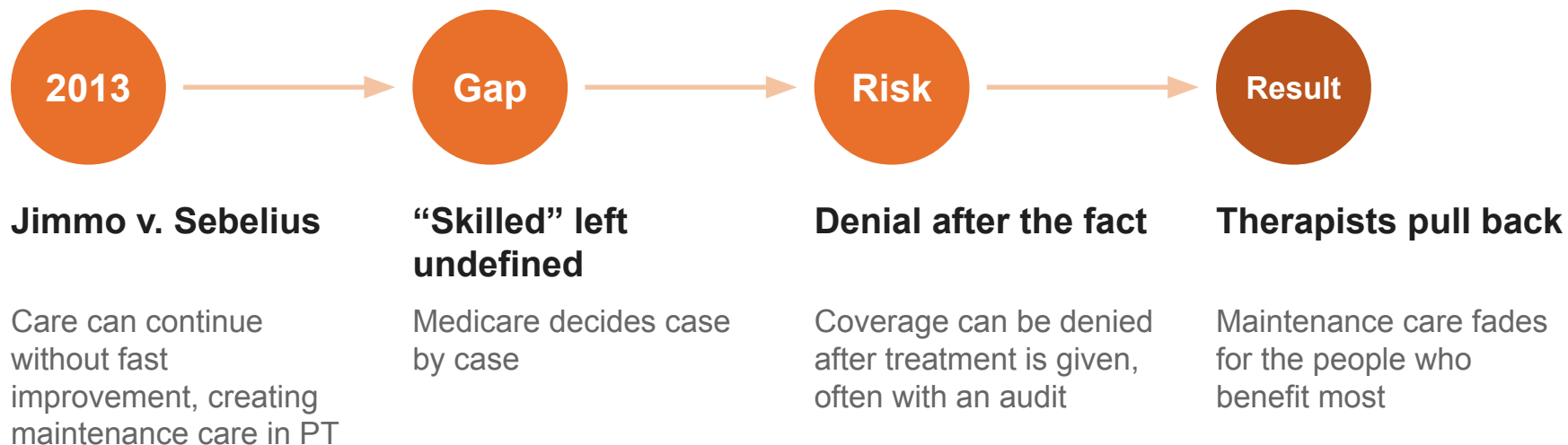


Board certification



Accountability to a regulated board

Medicare defines “skilled” case by case, so therapists avoid maintenance care



**Movement is the future,
and cash is the key.**

PTs can be the buffer between the home and the hospital

We are this population's most accessible provider, yet despite doctoral degrees and Direct Access laws, PTs are barely used within the system.



Start small

Begin within our own community



Cash or volunteer model

Best way to expand both availability and quality of care



Build local support

Community, nonprofits, organizations and local government

Social Security and Medicare depend on government funding, so change has to start locally.

Home and Happy keeps older adults at home for as long as possible



Equipment Donation

- Insurance covers only one piece of equipment
- We provide more permanent or unique equipment



In-Home Therapy

- Complements insurance-based care
- Prevents deconditioning after discharge or between 90-day re-evaluations
- Recommends equipment to improve safety and ease caregiver burden
- Puts a provider in the home for faster communication and emergency support

Free for adults 65+ in Erie and Niagara County · Founded 2022

Home and Happy has donated 140 pieces of equipment and given 200 therapy sessions

140

pieces of equipment
donated since 2022

200

in-home therapy sessions
since 2023



Community Equipment Facebook group
connects neighbors with equipment

OUR FUTURE GOALS



Lift Chair Program

2–3 lift chairs gifted by year end



Ramp building program



Portable elevator + van transportation



Home remodeling

www.home-happy.org

Movement Is Medicine. Movement Is Independence.

Thank you and keep moving!

Dana Robbins, PT, DPT

Home and Happy Inc. | www.home-happy.org

Buffalo Health and Fitness | www.buffalohealthandfitness.com

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Hyperlipidemia

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Type 2 Diabetes

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