

Sharing the Healing Powers of Pilates

Pilates teachers who work in physical therapy and sports medicine clinics, hospitals, doctors' and chiropractors' offices face unique challenges—but some amazing bonuses.

by Anne Marie O'Connor

THE 80-YEAR-OLD WITH A NEW HIP. The 24-year-old paralyzed from a diving accident. Dancers with foot problems, skiers with knee injuries, office workers with debilitating back and neck pain—these are just a few of the challenging clients Pilates teachers who work in a medical setting encounter on an everyday basis. But as Anneke Kruger, a Pilates teacher who works at Pure Sports Medicine Clinic in London, puts it, “when movement and medicine meet, magic happens.” Here, four teachers who work in medical offices and clinics share their experiences.

JEN MONTGOMERY

WHERE SHE WORKS: at a Pilates studio inside a physical therapy clinic

The Pilates Shoppe is a full-service Pilates studio located within Aliso Viejo Physical Therapy in Aliso Viejo, CA. We teach clients referred by the PTs, but also teach Reformer classes and privates for the general public.

PILATES BACKGROUND: I trained and certified with STOTT Pilates at John Garey Pilates in Long Beach, CA. I've also completed the BASI Pilates for Dancers certification with Karen Clippinger.

SPECIAL CERTIFICATIONS THAT HELPED HER LAND HER JOB: I did STOTT Pilates' injuries and special populations workshop; while I wouldn't say it specifically helped me land my job, it was an invaluable workshop.

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WORKING AT A STUDIO AND IN A MEDICAL SETTING: I had previously taught at a large fitness-style Reformer studio, which was fun but it would have been hard to make a living there long-term. I also taught in a luxury fitness club that had an on-site Pilates studio, but I disliked the constant pressure to sell. Teaching from my house was fun but not ideal with a young family. Once I started working at The Pilates Shoppe, I didn't look back. Here, I'm constantly challenged to tailor the Pilates repertoire to clients

with very specific needs, plus I also teach Pilates for fitness. That helps keep my job creative and fresh and helps me avoid burnout.

Working in a PT clinic has been a better way to make a living (than working in a studio). It's allowed me to grow a steady, loyal clientele over the years. It's also been a great way to balance work and raising children. My kids are now teenagers and I have a fulfilling career that has grown with me and my family.

ADVICE FOR OTHER TEACHERS: Be sure you know who you're partnering with. Make sure they believe in, and are familiar with, Pilates and want to truly team with you versus just trying to rent an empty space in their facility. If [the medical professional] isn't familiar with Pilates, invite them to take sessions with you so they can have a better understanding of the value of Pilates and how it can help their patients. The physical therapist who founded our clinic was a huge fan of Pilates, and very early on incorporated Pilates equipment into the practice, so it was the best-case scenario for me.

MICHELLE GANNON

WHERE SHE WORKS: with a physical therapy clinic

I share space with Excel PT in Jackson, WY. It has been a great relationship, especially with all the skiers, mountain climbers and other adventure-seeking athletes who come here. We continuously collaborate and transition patients and clients both from PT to Pilates and vice versa, when the client may need more than the scope of Pilates allows.

PILATES BACKGROUND: I'm Balanced Body trained with Tom McCook in Mountain View, CA.

SPECIAL CERTIFICATIONS THAT HELPED HER LAND HER JOB: I have a comprehensive certification in working with injured populations.

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WORKING AT A STUDIO AND IN A MEDICAL SETTING: You have to be ready, mentally and physically, to work with

OPPOSITE PAGE: MICHELLE GANNON, WHO SHARES SPACE WITH A PHYSICAL THERAPY CLINIC, SAYS THAT IT'S INCREDIBLY REWARDING TO HELP PEOPLE RECOVER FROM AN INJURY.

AT RIGHT: JEN MONTGOMERY SAYS THAT WORKING AT A PHYSICAL THERAPY CLINIC OFFERS HER AN OPPORTUNITY TO CONTINUALLY LEARN NEW THINGS FROM THE PTS.



broken bodies and spirits; both the general public and athletes can suffer from low spirits during a recovery process. But working side by side with PTs allows for a strong recovery of the injured.

Overall, I find it incredibly rewarding to work with a population trying to recover from injury. Seeing a patient/client overcome a life-changing injury and then go back to their physical passion is such an amazing testament to what we do.

ADVICE FOR OTHER TEACHERS: It's definitely not for every Pilates professional; you rarely have students who are at their full health potential and for some instructors, that can be a tough road. Be patient, curious and communicative with your clients and the PTs. Learn from every experience but always stay humble and work within your scope.

ANNEKE KRUGER

WHERE SHE WORKS: at a sports medicine clinic

I'm a freelance Pilates instructor at Pure Sports Medicine Clinic in London. The clinic's team includes sports-medicine doctors, physiotherapists, osteopaths, nutritionists, a soft tissue therapist and strength and condition coaches. Each of Pure Sports' seven locations has its own small Pilates studio. We see a huge variety of clients from rehabilitation to top-level athletes.

PILATES BACKGROUND: I did my original Pilates teacher training in 2009 with Body Control Pilates in the U.K. I've since trained with Karin Gurtner, Michael King, James D'Silva and Rebekah Rotstein, among others.

SPECIAL CERTIFICATIONS THAT HELPED HER LAND HER JOB: It was essential to them that I'm a fully comprehensive Pilates teacher. I also have a qualification in pre- and postnatal Pilates and have years of experience in working with clients with lower back pain. Having a specialty can certainly help when you work in a big clinic.

OTHER TRAINING THAT'S BEEN HELPFUL: Having sound anatomy knowledge is a plus. Doing Anatomy Trains in Motion and Slings Myofascial Training with the Art of Motion, developed by Karin Gurtner and based on the work of Tom Myers, has really helped my understanding of the human body. I can apply what I know as a Slings Myofascial Training practitioner to help the person find better

balance in the body. Apart from this it also gave me neutral, nonjudgmental language to explain to the patient in simple terms the body-wide patterns I see.

I also attended a four-day immersive workshop called Functional Anatomy for Movement and Injuries for movement professionals that's hosted by Kinected at the Icahn School of Medicine in New York that truly helped anatomy come to life for me.

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WORKING AT A STUDIO AND IN A MEDICAL SETTING: The main one is that we mainly offer private Pilates sessions. Calling people patients and not clients was a big adjustment. Also, at the clinic patients are recovering from an injury or have a very specific training goal, so they do their block of sessions, achieve their goal and move on, whereas Pilates studios usually have a loyal base of people who attend weekly classes for many years.

ADVICE FOR OTHER TEACHERS: If you're looking for a job at a big clinic, having experience definitely helps. If you haven't worked with a medical professional before, you could start with a small network of medical professionals in your area; approach them in person, tell them what you do and offer them a free session. Once they start referring to you, continue building the relationship. You will learn from the process and from each person and build your experience and credentials in this way.

SHARON SPAZIANI

WHERE SHE WORKS: at a small studio for post-rehab clients

Currently, I own Millstone Pilates & Sports Massage Therapy, a small studio for in Millstone, NJ, where most of my clients are referred by a doctor. Previously, I've worked in a physical therapy clinic, in a chiropractor's office; and at a Pilates studio in a hospital setting.

PILATES BACKGROUND: I got my mat certification in 1999, then took Polestar's comprehensive training and was certified in 2002.

SPECIAL CERTIFICATIONS THAT HELPED HER LAND HER JOB: I'm also a licensed massage therapist and a certified rehabilitation technician. Having over 20 years of hands-on experience as a massage therapist bodyworker has helped immensely and is the perfect combination for this type of specialized work.

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WORKING AT A STUDIO AND IN A MEDICAL SETTING: I worked in a Pilates studio in a hospital-based setting from 2011 to 2014. I got to work with some conditions that maybe my training had not specifically prepared me for, so I needed to be willing to do research and reach out to the client's medical team for recommendations.

ADVICE FOR OTHER TEACHERS: I think trust is crucial when working with referrals from medical professionals. They need to trust that you have their patients' best interests at heart and that you will work only within your scope of practice. When working with patients, take it slow. Constantly check in with them as you work with them. **PS**

The Upsides (and Downsides) of Working with Rehab Patients

Teachers who work in health professionals' practices talk about the pros and cons of working with medical professionals, and with the patients who most need the healing power of Pilates.

THE PROS CONSTANT LEARNING

Working at a physical therapy clinic offers nonstop education, says Jen Montgomery. "The physical therapists are also a constant source of learning and information for me. It's like on-the-job training that never ends."

"I'm constantly learning from the medical professionals," agrees Anneke Kruger. "All staff are invited to regular staff training and workshops; we are also encouraged to have sessions with one another. With better understanding of health conditions and patterns, I can better design bespoke movement programs."

WORKING WITH OTHER PROS

"When a patient is referred to Pilates, I confer with the PT to get instructions on the patient's needs and limitations," Montgomery explains.

Kruger also says that the Pilates teacher is a member of the team. "Whether it's the sports doctor, soft tissue therapist, physiotherapist or osteopath who refers a patient to Pilates, we always have a conversation before I see the patient for the first time," she says. "Sometimes we'll have a joint session; for example, the doctor will see the patient and

then sit in when the patient has his or her introductory Pilates session. We also have meetings to discuss patient progress. It's a very supportive environment. Our motto is 'one body, one team.'"

BUILT-IN REFERRALS

Working in a medical setting means there's a constant flow of new clients, as people seek out its healing benefits. But because it's the medical professionals—PTs, orthopedists, sports-medicine doctors—who actually refer patients, it may take a while for them to learn about Pilates and come to appreciate its role in the recovery process. "When I started working [at a PT clinic], I was teaching mostly for fitness, but over time, I developed the trust and respect of our PTs," says Montgomery. "Once that trust was established, the patient referrals started flowing."

MOTIVATED CLIENTS

"For me, I think the biggest pro is that our clients are really motivated to do Pilates for the best reasons: to feel better, to move better and to keep getting stronger," says Montgomery. "They are really invested in incorporating Pilates into their lifestyle going forward to stay healthy. These type of clients are also usually the most long-term and loyal to the studio."

DETAILED BACKGROUND NOTES ON CLIENTS/ PATIENTS

"We have one database for all patients and we all consult the notes before a session with a patient, so you know exactly what to expect before you see him or her," says Kruger.

GREAT WORKING HOURS

Medical offices tend to keep more standard business hours, and may not be open early in the mornings and later at night like standard Pilates studios. And because patients are scheduled all day long, at regular intervals, you may have less downtime. "I'm contracted to teach a block of eight hours at a time," says Kruger. "Often at Pilates studios you'd have busy mornings and then a big break till the evening classes, but my hours at the clinic are consecutive."

Adds Montgomery, "I love not having to drive to multiple studios," she says. "I'm able to make the most of my time when I'm at work."

HELPING PEOPLE IN PAIN

"For me the rewards are many, including helping to educate and motivate people when illness and injury have sometimes taken that away from them," says Sharon Spaziani. "How lucky we are as Pilates teachers that

we bring so much more to it than simply fitness!"

"It's incredibly fulfilling helping someone heal and recover," agrees Montgomery.

THE CONS A BUSY ENVIRONMENT

"We share the space with other movement professionals, so at times it can be a little busier and noisier than the usual ambience in a Pilates studio," notes Kruger.

DETAILED NOTES

Like all the medical professionals, Pilates teachers make detailed notes following every session, which takes time, says Kruger. You may end up doing some of this work outside your contracted hours, so it's essentially unpaid work.

LESS FLEXIBLE TIME OFF

"When you freelance for a studio or work for yourself, you can usually take holidays when you want," she explains.

"And at a studio, there is always another teacher who can cover on short notice. At the clinic I need to plan and request leave well in advance."

NONE OF THE ABOVE!

"Cons? I honestly can't think of any!" says Montgomery.