

Interview

The Power of Physical Therapy

An Interview with Matt Rome, PT, DPT, OCS,
Owner/Physical Therapist, Equilibrium Physical Therapy



The entry and reception area of Equilibrium Physical Therapy

EDITORS' NOTE Dr. Matt Rome is a licensed Physical Therapist with a Clinical Doctorate in Physical Therapy. He graduated magna cum laude from George Washington University where he received his bachelor of science in exercise and sport science. He went on to attend Duke University where he graduated summa cum laude and was awarded his doctorate of physical therapy. Dr. Rome is a board certified orthopedic specialist, a certified vestibular specialist, and a Maitland trained orthopedic manual therapist. He specializes in the treatment of orthopedic and spinal injuries, complex vestibular diagnostics, lower extremity evaluation and orthotic fabrication, and postural conditions contributing to chronic headaches. Dr. Rome's motivation for easy and inexpensive access to well instructed evidence-based continuing education led him to develop Physical Therapy Nation, a website dedicated to teaching advanced physical therapy evaluation and treatment techniques through video.



Matt Rome

COMPANY BRIEF Equilibrium Physical Therapy (equilibriumpt.com) was founded based on a passion for individualized care and attention during rehabilitation. It features private treatment rooms, never overbooks and provides one-on-one physical therapy for the entire session. Equilibrium provides care that is proven to be clinically efficacious in supporting literature. In addition, it has a staff of highly skilled niche physical therapists in a variety of specialty fields who have advanced board certifications.

What was your vision behind creating Equilibrium Physical Therapy and how did you intend to differentiate the business?

I fell into private practice after I worked for three years in an outpatient orthopedic private practice in New York and became frustrated with the decreasing time with patients and increased volume. Typical practices contract with insurance companies who are cutting reimbursement rates, so these types of practices respond by raising volume and decreasing treatment time to accommodate for it.

Clinicians who previously were treating nine patients a day are now seeing 16 to 20 just to bring up the volume to get the reimbursement numbers where they were previously.

After three years, I had burned out. I'm passionate about providing attentive care, and I love spending time with the patient when they walk in the door to find out how they're feeling rather than feeling rushed.

I knew the only way to improve the quality of care was to go out of network and offer a cash-based model while providing patients with a beautiful space, private rooms and board-certified clinicians. I went independent and gradually built up my practice with that model.

Originally, I went solo and when it reached the point where the demand was more than I could handle, I started growing the team.

Has there been a shift to where patients come to a physical therapist first based on the level of expertise that is out there?

One of the challenges facing the American Physical Therapy Association is promoting awareness of who we are, what we do, and what our degrees and certifications are.

As the physical therapy degree transitioned from a masters to a doctorate degree, the added curriculum was designed to develop our ability to perform a proper differential diagnosis. This means we can take a referral off the street without a prescription and decide to treat the patient or refer them out.

This is changing how physical therapy practices operate as well as how we market ourselves. Every state is slightly different with regard to direct access legislature, so check your local state board.

How important is it to focus on prevention and wellness?

There is increasing motivation for health insurance companies to look into the benefit of reimbursing wellness and prevention programs to limit future healthcare spending.

Regardless, a good physical therapist understands we can't see a patient a few times a week and resolve pathology without personal adherence to a program. Creating a lifestyle change is important.

How hard is it to cut through the noise when there is so much competition?

It is difficult to get the message out because many people are not aware of what good physical therapy actually is.

I have videos on my YouTube channel and company website where my goal is to enlighten people regarding what to ask when inquiring about a physical therapy clinic. Are there private rooms? How experienced is my physical therapist and do they have advanced certifications? Most importantly, how much time does the patient spend one on one with the therapist.

Do your clinicians have specialty focuses or do they work with all types of patients?

With the physical therapy degree, we are trained to treat all neuromusculoskeletal pathologies.

Some PTs have experience treating niche areas such as vestibular diagnostics, joint manipulative therapy, orthotic fabrication, pediatrics, etc.

Would you discuss your focus on being a thought leader in this industry?

I graduated from Duke in 2008. About two weeks after I graduated, a friend and I came up with the idea of putting videos online to educate other clinicians about the advanced techniques we were taught. We were really lucky to be trained at Duke by some of the premiere orthopedic and vestibular physical therapists who were publishing a lot of new research about the efficacy of diagnostic tests and treatments we were using.

We produced these videos and included the peer-reviewed literary reference along with each one. This included the sensitivity, specificity and efficacy values of the tests, which demonstrate how well they actually work.

It's important for people to understand why and how we use treatments. This helps illustrate the movement toward evidence-based practice within the healthcare field. There is true evidence for what we're doing and why it works. There is not enough awareness of what a good clinical practice is, and hopefully we are helping with this – we now have 26,000 healthcare followers on our Physical Therapy Nation YouTube channel.

Is technology changing the way you are treating patients?

The foundation of good care will always be a compassionate and skilled clinician. Technology is a valuable asset, but it's not the primary motivator of why one should see a clinician. It should be because the clinician listens to patients, takes detailed subjective histories, and spends time communicating with other members of the medical team involved in their cases. We have an antigravity treadmill, which is an amazing tool, but really it all comes back to how much time a practitioner spends with the patient.

How do you select the clinicians you hire?

I handpick everyone who works here based on clinical skill and personality. When I'm looking to hire a clinician, I require each candidate to work on me directly, and then we review case studies. A great clinician must have good clinical knowledge, but that is useless unless they are attentive, personable and able to provide an enjoyable experience for their patients. ●