Special Interview with Dr. Matt McClellan

Matt McClellan, a Doctor of Physical Therapy, has been an in-patient Physical Therapist at John C. Fremont Healthcare District since October 2024, where he helps people regain their functional mobility in the hope of returning to independent living. He is also a Coach at Mountain Fitness in Mariposa, holding strength training classes three times a week with an approachable and functional style. Dr. Matt recently returned to teaching at the Institute of Technology in Modesto, where he is using his role as Director of Clinical Education to train the next generation of Physical Therapist Assistants.

Dr. Matt earned his Doctorate in Physical Therapy from Samford University and brought with him, to Mariposa, experience from previous roles as a Director of Rehabilitation at a Skilled Nursing Facility, Owner of Cali Performance Physical Therapy, and CrossFit Level 2 Coach.

Matt is very candid about his desire for those in Mariposa County and beyond to live an active lifestyle.

He spoke with JCF Hospital Foundation's Executive Administrator Miranda Wass this past month.

What first brought you to Mariposa County?

I'm originally from Mississippi and lived in Alabama for several years after PT school. I took a travel job in 2020, finding myself in Merced out of all places. I met my wife there and we always seemed to escape to Mariposa for day trips and weekends. I didn't want to move to Mariposa at first because I was still running my outpatient practice at the time and thought the drive would be too taxing. Nonetheless, we bought our Bootjack homestead in July 2024 and I made the drive back and forth while we settled into our new home. After attending the Mariposa County Fair Rodeo that year, I swung by the John C. Fremont Healthcare District fair booth and noticed they didn't have a physical therapist listed on their schedule. I reached out right after the fair and, within a month, I was working for the Healthcare District. It was a nice change not having to drive back and forth to Merced and I began to meet all of the Mariposa Residents that worked at the hospital or came through the hospital doors as patients.

What role do you see physical activity playing in people's lives?

Physical activity is preventive medicine that will change people's lives for the better. Nine of the ten top leading causes of death can be mitigated by diet, exercise, and physical activity. And this is never more apparent than in the hospital, you can tell who is physically active right away. That's what drives me to encourage people to be active NOW. Chopping wood, gardening, building fences - it all counts. Physical activity can be social, and is most definitely a form of self

care. But people make excuses not to do it, especially if you call it “Exercise”. I’ve always had this thought of “Getting a Brick to run on a treadmill”. Everyone knows they need to eat better or be in better shape for longevity but it is hard to get people to cross that barrier to start. I want to help people move across that barrier. As I’ve gained more clinical skillsets, I feel like I am at that point of being able to get a brick to run on a treadmill.

What inspires you to serve our rural community?

I grew up in a rural area where people had limited access to healthcare, no one walked anywhere due to lack of sidewalks, and culturally physical activity and exercise were “needless forms of energy expenditure”. Mariposa is more rural than where I grew up, but we have access to a lot of health and wellness facilities such as gyms and fitness studios. We have more of a need to be strong and physically capable. I know what it looks like to have an older generation be physically inactive and want to inspire our community to be as healthy as possible. Being physically active at any age improves outcomes later in life. I want to use my skillsets to build a community around healthy living.

What makes rural healthcare challenging?

Every area of healthcare has different barriers, but the sheer distance between residents and their providers can be a barrier in Mariposa. In urban areas there are tons of services that can be provided and none of them are limited by ease of access. Here, we might have to keep someone in the hospital a few extra days to regain strength because they have stairs into their homes, use a wood stove to heat their home, and need to be able to evacuate quickly during fire season. You don’t have those types of problems in other areas. And if you do there are 12 different people or services to choose from that can help you out. So really, back to physical activity and independence, as a provider I have to do more in rural healthcare to make sure my patients are knowledgeable and capable. Because if they can’t do it for themselves they likely don’t have anyone close enough to help them out. Or the time between them realizing they need additional help and the time it takes to get to them will be too long. The challenge is to make sure you can do more with less.

What makes rural healthcare special?

Being in a small town, and from a small town, I can build trust with community members and patients by being active in the community. Rural healthcare is a very personable, human experience. It's a very broad category. I love that I can wear different hats in the community as a physical therapist and fitness coach. This broadens my ability to improve patient outcomes.
If I can do really well with a patient through health education, they in turn bring that lifestyle change to their family, then to their community. It’s a fantastic ripple effect.

If you would like to contact Dr. Matt for more information, you can do so by sending an email to DrMatt.Physio@gmail.com or finding more information at his clinic website caliperformance.org