

# Day in the Life: D&D Sports Medicine

*D&D Sports Medicine, a business owned by Kathy Dieringer, EdD, ATC, LAT, and Susan Daggett, LPT, ATC, LAT, serves the Texas communities of Denton, Sanger and Aubrey. We visited them in November to experience a typical day in the clinical setting.*

Text & Images **Darrin Scheid**

**7:10 a.m.** D&D Sports Med co-owner Kathy Dieringer has opened the Denton-county office, along with two other staff members. Dieringer was the head athletic trainer at nearby Texas Woman's University before she went into corporate sports medicine in 1998. She has been at the current facility for the past eight years. While Dieringer catches up on email and gets the facility up and running for the day, two athletes—a high school diver and a registered nurse—go through rehabilitation exercises. The nurse suffered a femur injury and is in the final stages of recovery.

**8:15 a.m.** In the past 90 minutes, D&D office manager Heather Eperjesi has been entering patient charts and answering the phone while waiting for staff to arrive and take over. Dieringer has spent nearly a half hour on the phone dealing with two issues, a computer problem at the clinic she has been trying to get resolved and a question regarding the upcoming 63rd NATA Annual Meeting & Clinical Symposia in St. Louis next summer. Dieringer is the chair of the Clinical and Emerging Practices Athletic Trainers Committee and is helping organize a peer-to-peer session at the meeting. It's also payroll week, which means Dieringer is trying to make sure the staff gets paid.

**8:30 a.m.** Dorinda Frick, a 67-year-old retired teacher, leaves the clinic after another day of exercise. She works out two days per week at D&D and first started coming to the clinic in February 2008 after she fell and suf-



ferred a knee injury that included torn tendons and a broken kneecap. After two surgeries and three months of rehabilitation, Frick took advantage of D&D's fitness program and now works out at the facility two times per week. "I used to just walk for exercise, but this gives me a chance to work on several different areas," Frick said. "It has improved my health tremendously. I can do things that I couldn't do before the accident. I don't have the equipment at home, so I really couldn't do anything for strength. And you just aren't as committed at home. It's easy to do something else."

**9:55 a.m.** Nicole Fralick, a rehabilitation technician and pre-physical therapy graduate student at the University of North Texas, works on a patient who suffered a knee injury in a wakeboarding accident. Fralick is doing neuro-

muscular re-education in the patient's quad area. Fralick is no stranger to sports medicine. A former Level 10 gymnast from Houston, she worked alongside athletic trainer Harris Argo. Dieringer and Argo are former classmates, which is how Fralick became connected with the clinic. Fralick graduated from Baylor with a degree in fashion merchandising before she realized that helping people is really her passion. "I like the variety of patients," she said. "We see everything from high school athletes to senior citizens, so there is always something different." And what about that patient's knee? "He still has a ways to go. We're working on full extension. He'll get there."

**10:45 a.m.** Once per month, the D&D management staff meets at a local restaurant for a staff meeting. Dieringer and business partner

Susan Daggett, PT, ATC, LAT, have a full agenda, including everything from Medicare billing to finding a good date for the office holiday party. While Dieringer spends the bulk of her time at the original Denton location, Daggett is splitting her time between the offices in Sanger, about 10 miles north, and the Aubrey location. Aubrey is the third of three clinics and is located 15 miles east. “It’s so hard to get all three clinics on the same page. Our philosophies are the same, but they are so far away and each clinician is different. Getting people on the same page is why we have those meetings—and we need to plan. We also share staff. When vacations come or school is out, we have to talk with each other and make sure everybody is covered. That meeting did away with all the phone calls and text messages.”

**1:05 p.m.** Jason Jessup, PT, LAT, has a packed schedule from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., with only a couple of small breaks in between. Jessup said helping people and doing a job he loves makes the day fly by. A typical day involves arriving in the morning and reviewing notes from the night before, going through evaluations and daily notes to make sure all the information on each patient is in order. He looks at the schedule for that day, paying particular attention to new patients he might be seeing or somebody coming from another clinic.

“We see a little bit of everything here,” Jessup said. “One of my favorite parts of this profession is talking with a patient and helping them understand what diagnosis a doctor might have come up with for them. Sometimes, we’re the ones who put it in language the patient can understand and help them get on with their recovery without fear and confusion.” Jessup is a former college base-



ball player who studied athletic training at St. Edward’s in Austin, Texas. He went to physical therapy school at Texas Woman’s University.

**1:25 p.m.** Marie Valdez, ATC, PT, LAT, the manager of D&D Sports Medicine of Sanger, stops by the Denton clinic to speak with Dieringer about an issue in the other clinic. Valdez said the biggest problem in Sanger right now is that the number of patients needing treatment increased when the clinic hired an additional therapist. “We’re trying to work out scheduling...just how to manage the work load.”

**2:05 p.m.** The clinic reaches the height of its activity on this Tuesday. Seven patients are being treated while another has shown up early for an appointment. Jason is working with a woman on a Swiss ball to increase flexibility. Andra Sterzik, OTR, MOT, CHT, one of the clinic’s three rotating occupational therapists, is helping a 20-something athlete recover from an elbow injury while two other patients rehabilitate leg injuries. Another member of the D&D fitness program enters and heads straight toward an exercise bicycle.

**2:41 p.m.** The clinic saw 80 people the day before. When it appears that Tuesday would be the same or even busier, Eperjesi steps into Dieringer’s office to work out a scheduling issue. The schedule is already full for the week, and today is only Tuesday. Eperjesi says there have been so many patient referrals the past two weeks that there is very little room. “It’s a great problem to have, but...” Dieringer said. Eperjesi’s solution is to shuffle some patients to the PTA or

open early. They could also be placed on Saturday. The clinic is open on Saturday to returning patients. “Next week will be a whole new challenge because of the [Thanksgiving] holiday week,” Eperjesi said. The original plan was to close on Friday during the Thanksgiving weekend, but it appears that the clinic will need to be open the full day.

**3:05 p.m.** Kathy Heimerdinger, PT, is working with a male patient who is dealing with recovery from a 5-level lumbar fusion surgery. “We’re working on balance, coordination and muscular control,” she said. “I’ve had him now for eight visits. With him, he was basically debilitated with chronic back problems to the point that he was unable to perform most activities of daily living. The goal with him at the very least is to get him to the point where he can regain some of his independence.” Heimerdinger has worked at the clinic for more than five years. “What I like about this place is that it’s such a collaborative team. We have the same goals of getting our patients better so there is a lot of interaction.”

**3:40 p.m.** Sterzik is working with a patient with an elbow injury. The patient has fractures in her elbow and right hand that required a plate and screws. She had two surgeries – one on the elbow in July and one just six weeks before this visit on the hand. “Now she is at the point where we can start working on her elbow,” Sterzik said. “There was bad blood supply. Doctors put extra bone in there and screwed



it back together.” Sterzik discovered the D&D Sports Med clinic when she was a patient experiencing back problems. When Dieringer and her management team discovered that Sterzik was an occupational therapist, they asked if she wanted to work there. “One day turned into two days, and now, here I am. The healing process is very gratifying, and you see that recovery very quickly with the injuries we see.”

**4:45 p.m.** Helen Severson, PTA, has been working at the clinic about four years. Today she is helping a patient with extreme arthritis and postural issues. Severson says the range of motion they are looking for is 20-30 percent. I’ve already seen her for about eight visits, and she’s maintaining. The goal is to get her to sort of own the program and do it at home so she will continue to improve. Right now, 45 minutes is about all she can tolerate.”

**5:04 p.m.** Jessup consults with a senior citizen and her daughter about the older

woman’s left knee, which has recently been replaced. After speaking with both for a few minutes, he decides to measure the women’s range of motion to get some baseline numbers. He works with her for nearly a half hour on strength and mobility exercises. “That was a first visit, so we had to do some measuring,” he said. “She’s actually doing very well already, but we’ll work with her and get some improvement.” Meanwhile, two patients are receiving shoulder and hand treatment from Sterzik. Dieringer has finished working with her book-keeper in preparation for tax season while managing a repairman who has been changing all the light ballasts.

**6:00 p.m.** The clinic takes patients up to 6 p.m. to make sure the 9-to-5 working crowd can get therapy. When the final patient leaves, Dieringer prepares the clinic for the next day. She double-checks the equipment and makes sure the paperwork for that day is in order. Dieringer takes a look at the schedule for the



next day to make sure the clinic will be fully staffed. She was originally scheduled to do some outreach for a local gymnastics program, but the appointment was canceled.

**7:00 p.m.** Door closed. In total, the clinic treated 75 patients on this Tuesday.

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