



Melvin Robert Friedman, D.O.
Osteopathic Physician and Surgeon

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James Conforti, Interim President and CEO
Sutter Health
2200 River Plaza Drive
Sacramento, CA 95833

Dear Mr. Conforti:

I have been a practicing physician in San Mateo, board certified in Family Practice and Neuromuscular Medicine for over 35 years. Most of my patients who are referred to me deal with chronic conditions that other practitioners have not been able to solve themselves, most often related to pain and trauma.

Among other modalities, I have referred many to the Mickelson Arthritis and Rehabilitation Center for therapy and maintenance of their chronic conditions for rehabilitation or to keep up their accustomed levels of functionality to avoid further disability.

Over these troubling times of the pandemic, I watched many of my patients who have been longtime users of the therapy pool decline in function, become more limited in their activities of daily living, exist with greater disability and often wither physically. While initially thinking this was a symptom of the pandemic, **I came to see a common theme: that their access to the warm water pool at Mickelson had been cut off.** This was and has been progressively disturbing to me as I watch people I have cared for decline in front of my eyes, **many of whom have expressed that they have given up or are headed toward complete disability or death.**

This great resource for my patients over the years has been a godsend, in that so many of them start unable to function on land or perform the rehabilitative efforts demanded of them with land therapy. However, in the therapy pool, the anti-gravitational assistance of their buoyancy in the water combined with the warmth of this special facility allows them to go beyond their normal limits.

Many of the conditions I have treated, while unsolvable for cure, have been helped or managed as a result of regularly going to Mickelson. Among these conditions are:

- chronic pain disorders
 - including back pain and joint pain
 - degenerative disc disorder
 - Diabetic Peripheral Neuropathy
 - spinal radiculitis
 - spinal stenosis with neurogenic claudication
 - Arthritis (osteo and rheumatoid)
 - fibromyalgia
 - gout
 - sciatica
 - Complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS)
 - Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSI)
 - neurodegenerative disorders

- bursitis
- tendonitis
- recovery from strokes
- spinal cord injuries
- neuromuscular disease
- traumatic brain injuries
- Parkinson's/nervous system disorder
- problems due to muscle weakness imbalance on one side
- difficulty with walking or mobility
- muscle spasms
- scoliosis
- polio
- autoimmune connective tissue disorder
- muscular dystrophy
- muscular sclerosis
- ALS
- cerebral palsy
- car accident injuries
- sports injuries (e.g. torn ACL)
- post-surgical rehabilitation (joint replacements, lower extremity fractures, orthopedic strengthening and pain)
- amputation rehabilitation and fitness maintenance
- circulation problems
- cardio-pulmonary rehabilitation and fitness maintenance
- obesity
- high risk pregnancy
- pediatric issues include many of the above in addition to:
 - balance and coordination/motor skills
 - autism
 - chronic pain related to Down Syndrome

The Mickelson therapy pool has been a tremendous resource for my patients for multiple reasons, including:

- Water supports the body while providing gentle resistance.
- Buoyancy helps patients avoid joint strain.
- Water provides a level of resistance training replacing the gravitational work many patients cannot do on land.
- The warmth of the water—a unique feature of aquatic warm water therapy rehab pools—helps circulation, is anti-inflammatory and calming. Water at a temperature of 90 or higher, as specified by the Arthritis Foundation, has a unique pain mitigation effect unlike cooler water. It soothes sore muscles and offers stress reduction along with muscle relaxation, especially in arthritis sufferers.
- Water can help improve balance without fear of falling.
- The therapy pool environment provides mental health benefits such as social interaction or meditative time alone.
- Senior citizens benefit from the reduced-impact environment to strengthen muscles without impact damage to aging joints and bones.
- In our rapidly aging population, access to aquatic exercise and/or therapy provides a vitally important service to the community in keeping its senior citizens independent, active and healthy.

Additionally, water exercises not only improve muscle power, but larger motions like walking or running or utilizing the whole arm more mimic the activities of daily living and mirror function in the way we actually use in life as opposed to the narrowed down versions—helpful in their own way—that we typically prescribe in regular land physical therapy. For many, it is the closest version of aerobic efforts they could ever reach in their lives on land; and without this, there is no hope of reaching or maintaining any semblance of healthy cardiovascular function.

Inclusive in the above is that water provides a personal sense of well-being, safety in the world, and a sense of purpose where physical and emotional balance are addressed. **There has been a growing specter of melancholy and depression of my patients who were once regulars at Mickelson.**

Specifically, as an Osteopathic Physician, it has been our heritage that 80% of chronic medical conditions respond to clean air, good nutrition, exercise, healthy relationships and rest. The remaining 20% involve genetic, traumatic, surgical or pharmaceutical interventions. This really gives a perspective on the place of lifestyle in our health, and self-care. **For me, any institution which provides community healthcare should emphasize and support these public health, high yield measures as a central tenet of their service within a community.** This is where services like the warm water pool at the Mickelson Center, as well as classes for yoga, stress reduction, addiction counseling and support for people in abusive relationships—to name a few—should be an essential priority in our community health outlook. In spite of our movement to better applications of technology and efficiency in medicine, the public is growing more vulnerable to toxicity, chronic inflammation, obesity and deterioration, sicknesses of modern life, and is simultaneously turning away from common sense and aged-old health wisdom.

In supporting basic health practices, we can do way more in impacting the health of our community by providing a therapy pool and focusing on health and prevention instead of the newest technologies which many times do not lend toward better outcomes in recovery or disease management.

I would personally love to see our wonderful community hospitals, which we are so fortunate to have here, **focus on what makes and keeps people well and not just be there only for when our bodies have failed us. To do this, hospitals and medical centers need to be leaders in demonstrating health in living rather than take away a resource that was actually making people well.**

I do not know what has transpired behind the scenes in the controversy regarding the closure of the Mickelson therapy pool, and while as such, do not know the legal issues. As a private institution, I do feel that Sutter Health is entitled to function as they choose, **but when a healthcare institution fails to meet the basic needs of common-sense public health issues in their community, it does reflect on their integrity.**

Sincerely,



Mel Friedman, D.O., F.C.A.
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Board Certified, Family Practice and Neuromuscular Medicine
Author, "Where Spirit Touches Matter, A Journey Towards Wholeness"