



Partners on a path to wellness

How a tenacious healer helped his patient find hope

A bump on the head and a cancerous thyroid combined to devastate Mark Johnston's health and vigor. But a primary care provider at the Ko-Kwel Wellness Center became an invaluable ally.

Daniel Carlson's expertise and tenacity eventually would revitalize Mark's body and restore his optimism. The story of their partnership illustrates the wellness center's holistic philosophy, which aims to heal the patient rather than just treat the symptoms.

"It's totally changed my life," Mark said.

One wrong step

Mark had always been rugged and vigorous. A lean 6-foot-five, he had been a high school and college athlete. He even considered professional baseball before turning to a career in tribal administration.

In his early 50s, Mark worked long days as executive director of the Coquille Indian Tribe. Evenings and weekends, he helped his wife run their farm. Still fit, he easily hefted a 50-pound post driver overhead to build cattle fences.

But in 2018, Mark walked into a low-hanging wooden beam at the tribe's Community Plankhouse. The impact tore a hole in his spinal cord.

Surgery reveals another issue

Worse news was still to come. Surgery to repair Mark's injury revealed a potentially life-threatening tumor on his thyroid. The gland would have to go.

By revealing the tumor, Mark's accident probably saved his life. But the combination of a spinal injury and



Physician Assistant Daniel Carlson, left, found the right combination of medication and diet to renew Mark Johnston's optimism about his health.

an absent thyroid created new problems. Mark's metabolism slowed and his energy level plunged, while neck pain restricted his physical activity.

"All my life, I've been able to eat whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted, and as much as I wanted," Mark said. "But once I lost my thyroid, things changed."

Please see page 2

Ko-Kwel Wellness Center
630 Miluk Drive
Coos Bay, OR 97420

Continued from previous page

Mark's body swelled from its customary 240 pounds to more than 280. Muscles atrophied in his neck and shoulders. He slept 11 hours a night yet constantly felt tired.

"Just getting out of bed and getting my clothes on and getting to work was an accomplishment," he said.

Daily doses of thyroid hormone gave limited help. On paper, Mark's hormone level was within the normal range – but just barely. He was miserable.

Expertise and patience

Then Mark found Daniel, a physician assistant at Ko-Kwel Wellness Center.

Physician assistants are highly trained healthcare professionals who collaborate with physicians. Along with family nurse practitioners, PAs help meet America's increasing need for primary-care providers.

Daniel had a special advantage in Mark's case. Before joining the Ko-Kwel Wellness Center last year, Daniel had pursued specialized training in endocrinology – treatment of hormones. He told Mark that carefully adjusting Mark's medications could improve his energy. Daniel was willing to put in the extra time and effort if Mark was. Mark was eager to try.

Daniel carefully dialed back one medication while adding another. He gently nudged the dosages to maximize Mark's energy. He also helped Mark change his diet.

Six months later, the results are evident. Mark is 32 pounds lighter. He has regained much of his previous energy. He needs less sleep, he accomplishes more in his job, and he's even trying some light farm work.

His neck still hurts, and the pain may never go away entirely. For the first time since his injury, however, Mark can foresee his strength returning.

He gives credit to Daniel and the Ko-Kwel Wellness Center, for the partnership and persistence that made it possible.



Above, Public Health Improvement Coordinator Jessica Hamner adds juice to a pedal-powered blender. The energy to run the "Smoothie Bike" comes from 11-year-old Guerin Wheeler.

A wellness welcome

The Ko-Kwel Wellness Center in Coos Bay was the venue for a health and wellness fair during the Coquille Tribe's recent Restoration Celebration. The annual gathering honors the anniversary of the 1989 legislation restoring the federal government's legal recognition of the tribe.

The wellness fair featured information booths, health screenings and fun activities for the little ones.

At right, Rebekah Boe stencils paint onto a child's arm. Rebekah works in Eugene's newly opened Ko-Kwel Wellness Center, but she traveled to Coos Bay to take part.



Wellness Calendar

July

**New in
July 2022**

Dial 988

from any phone to get help.

If you need immediate help now,
text **INDIGENOUS** to 741741

Suicide lifeline

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Native youth ages 10-24. Native communities experience the highest rates of suicide among all racial and ethnic groups in the United States. 988 is one step in the direction of saving lives.



Did you know?

Youth sports participation provides many benefits:

- Self-esteem, confidence
- Reduced suicide risk
- Goal setting, time management, work ethic
- Teamwork, leadership, relationship building
- Concentration, memory, academic performance

**National Youth Sports
Week is July 20-26**

World Breastfeeding Month, Aug. 1-7

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that infants be exclusively breastfed for about the first six months, if possible, with continued feeding while introducing complementary foods for one year or longer.

DON'T WAIT 'TIL GAME TIME



Schedule your student athlete's sports physical at the Ko-Kwel Wellness Center
541-888-9494

August

Vaccinate on time

**National Immunization
Awareness Month**
#ivax2protect

Getting vaccines at the recommended time is the best way to protect against serious disease.

Talk to your provider today for recommended vaccines to keep you and your family protected.

September

Dread bread?

People with celiac disease can't consume gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye and barley. An afflicted person's immune system attacks the small intestine.

**National Celiac Disease
Awareness Day is Sept. 13**

Meet our new medical director

Working in an American Indian health clinic feels like a natural fit to Dr. Keerti Jaini, despite her far different background.

“Although we are in totally opposite parts of the world, East and West, there are so many cultural similarities,” she says.

The indigenous peoples of North America and of Dr. Jaini’s homeland in India share ancient cultural traditions such as reverence for elders. They also share a history of colonization and subjugation.

So she feels a natural kinship to her American Indian patients.

Dr. Jaini attended medical school in India and served her residency in New Jersey. She and her husband, a software engineer, moved to Coos Bay seven years ago to be near his California-based job. He works mostly from home,



and they cherish the work-life balance they’ve found on the Oregon Coast.

Dr. Jaini practices at both North Bend Medical Center and Bay Area Hospital. Becoming medical director at Ko-Kwel Wellness Center adds a new dimension.

In her part-time role at KWC, she treats patients, supervises the other medical providers and handles some administrative duties. She’s a great addition to our team!

Dr. Jaini’s goals for KWC

- Primary care for every tribal member. Too many people, she says, let health care slide.
- Enhanced mental health care.
- Better patient follow-up on health-care providers’ recommendations. Limited resources and skepticism about medical care can be obstacles, Dr. Jaini says. Building patients’ trust is a key step.
- Medical alternatives such as chiropractic and naturopathy.
- Expanded relationships with specialists providing pain management, ear-nose-throat care, colonoscopies and more.

Reasons to switch



Why move your dental care to Kilkich?

- 1. Great care.** Our friendly, highly trained dental team emphasizes your comfort. We’re sensitive to your needs and your concerns.
- 2. Convenience.** KWC provides dental care under the same roof with our medical, pharmacy and behavioral health services.
- 3. It’s easy!** Just call us today, and we’ll send you a form to sign. When you send it back, we’ll contact your current dental office to transfer your records. It’s that simple!

(541) 888-9494
(866) 200-0744

www.kokwelwellness.org



Ko-Kwel
Wellness Center