

# Opioid-Free Chronic Pain Management Program Brings Excellent Outcomes to Rady Children's Hospital



Rady Children's Hospital-San Diego  
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Through a partnership with Children's Specialized Hospital in New Jersey, Rady Children's Hospital-San Diego is offering the first children's inpatient chronic pain program serving San Diego, Southern California and the southwestern United States. Children's Specialized Hospital has been at the forefront of chronic pain management, reporting significant, positive outcomes in pain reduction and quality of life improvement.

The 28-day residential program follows the Children's Specialized Hospital model of opioid- and pain medication-free chronic pain management using a whole-child, multidisciplinary approach. Along with [physical therapy](#), [occupational therapy](#) and psychotherapy, services include aquatic therapy; therapeutic yoga; meditation; recreation therapy; music, art and storytelling through Rady Children's [Healing Arts Program](#); and [healing touch](#) and [acupuncture](#) through Rady Children's [Integrative Medicine Program](#).

The program has a team of [specialized practitioners](#) capable of serving approximately four patients during their four-week stay. Due to the highly targeted treatment model, patient populations are kept small – as is the case with the New Jersey-based program – but will continue to scale over time.

Patients may also work with specialists in areas including neurology, behavioral health, rheumatology, orthopedics and gastroenterology. Providers collaborate on comprehensive, individualized care plans designed to help patients improve daily function, reduce pain, enhance self-awareness and learn alternative coping techniques.

“The goal is to provide each patient with the necessary tools and information to handle potential stressors that may precipitate flare-ups or relapse,” says [Andrew Skalsky, MD](#), who oversees the rehabilitation/physical medicine component of the program. Dr. Skalsky is chief of the Division of Rehabilitation/Physical Medicine at Rady Children's and associate clinical professor of orthopedic surgery at UC San Diego School of Medicine.

Since the partnership was launched in April 2019, the program has provided care to nine patients, with conditions including complex regional pain syndrome and related forms of amplified pain, such as fibromyalgia, amplified musculoskeletal pain syndrome, reflex sympathetic dystrophy, reflex neuropathic dystrophy, chronic headaches and chronic abdominal pain.

Among these patients was a 13-year-old girl with Behcet's disease and fibromyalgia. With intensive physical and occupational therapy, and being active throughout the day, she went from being wheelchair-bound to dancing without pain. **Watch the video above.**

“We're telling children that are in pain that they need to exercise and do activity every single day, as this helps them retrain both their body and brain,” says [Pritha Dalal, MD](#), a rehabilitation/physical medicine specialist in the program and assistant clinical professor of orthopedic surgery at UC San Diego School of Medicine. “The focus becomes on increasing function to decrease pain.”

As with the New Jersey program, outcomes have been excellent on both functionality and quality of life. Patients have demonstrated significant improvement from admission to discharge on multiple measurements: Patients' average pain level dropped from 7.4 to 4.0 on a 10-point scale; 43 percent of patients reported no school absences due to pain upon admission, while 96 percent reported no pain-related absences during a three-month follow-up; 96 percent of patients also complied with a home exercise program. All parents (100 percent) reported no missed work days due to their child's pain at a three-month follow-up. Additionally, patients had an improvement in average lower extremity activity from 30.9 of 80 at admission to 60.3 of 80 at discharge.

All of these outcomes were obtainable without the use of opioids, which, in addition to benefiting patients, also contributes to a major goal of Rady Children's: reducing overall Hospital opioid use while maintaining effective pain control. Over a two-year period, an institution-wide quality improvement initiative significantly reduced the number of ambulatory pediatric opioid prescriptions by 36 percent and ambulatory doses prescribed by 59 percent.

“Particularly with such a young patient demographic, eliminating opioid prescriptions in pain management is critical in reducing overuse and abuse on a national level, and in providing patients with customized pain coping strategies to regain function and support long-term management and self-sufficiency,” says Anke Reineke, PhD, director of Rady Children's chronic pain management program.

The Children's Specialized Hospital Chronic Pain Management Program at Rady Children's Hospital-San Diego is open to children 11 and older with a chronic pain diagnosis and who have access through eligible insurance.

If you have patients who could benefit from this program, please contact program director Anke Reineke, PhD, directly at 858-966-8959 or [see our website for more information](#).



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