

BioStep 2 – A favorite at Country Meadows Retirement Communities

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BIODEX
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BioStep 2 Elliptical Cross Trainer – a favorite at Country Meadows Retirement Communities

Country Meadows owns retirement communities with nine properties in Pennsylvania and one in Maryland, and offers personal care, memory care and restorative care services as well as independent living accommodations. Two of those locations, each with over 300 residents, also have a skilled nursing department while their other properties each have a fitness and physical/occupational therapy center on site. Their typical community of personal care and independent living properties each average roughly 200 residents.

“It’s all about the quality of the experience here,” says Kim Eichinger, Executive Director of Fitness for Country Meadows Retirement Community.

“The age of our residents tends to be 85 or older, and they choose our communities largely because of the programming we offer – especially in the fitness and rehabilitation fields,” states Eichinger. “We are unique in that we have a fully staffed fitness center separate from our physical and occupational therapy center within each community. So, if somebody wants to continue an exercise program, or they are moving in and want to begin one or simply work to maintain their independence, we are set up to help make that happen.”



Kim Eichinger, Executive Director
of Fitness for Country Meadows Retirement Community.

Promoting Independent Living

One piece of equipment that the fitness and wellness staff at Country Meadows relies on to keep their residents both well-conditioned and challenged is the Biodex BioStep 2 Semi-Recumbent Elliptical cross-trainer. With a low-impact elliptical motion that reduces the jarring start/stop direction change often associated with recumbent steppers, plus articulating footplates and pivoting handgrips, residents can use this device to comfortably strengthen the primary muscles associated with balance, gait and mobility while also getting some cardio benefit. Because it is so simple to use, supervision on this piece of equipment can be minimal and residents can progress at a natural pace.

“Our residents no longer fear simple technology – they move in with laptops, cell phones and digital cameras.”

“We use the BioStep 2 throughout our continuum of care,” explains Eichinger, an ACE Certified Instructor and Master Trainer for the Arthritis Foundation who has over 30 years’ experience in the fitness field to her credit. “Our independent living residents have access to it at all times so they can use this device outside the normal fitness center hours and operate it independently. Many choose to get on it early in the morning or during the evening hours in addition to the usual 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. routine. Because the BioStep is so easy to set up and operate – and because they feel safe on this piece of equipment – the BioStep has a big following in our communities. Maintaining independence is very important to many of the residents here and the opportunity to get on a piece of exercise equipment that doesn’t require a monitor has proven to be a big selling point. Our residents absolutely love this option.”

Simplicity Aids Restorative and Memory Support Residents

At the other end of the spectrum, the personal care staff at Country Meadows also provides restorative programs for individuals with physical challenges such as stroke, joint replacement, severe arthritis, Parkinson’s disease and even multiple sclerosis. For these people the BioStep’s ease of use features are especially important. Because the seat pivots and the armrests flip up and out of the way for ready access, transferring or helping these residents onto the system is a breeze.

“From the restorative program perspective,” states Eichinger, “I’m very impressed by the foot supports. On a typical recumbent cycle, it’s easy for the foot to slip off the pedal unless you use a bunch of straps. With the BioStep 2, the user’s foot stays on the footplate even without straps. It’s a simple point of convenience for our staff, but a reassuring measure of dignity for some of our physically-challenged residents. If they are able to keep their feet in place on their own, they can engage their arms and legs to start a session with little or no help – even if they have use of only one arm or one leg. That adaptability is very important. We have one younger resident here, for example, who is in the more advanced stages of MS. For him, the BioStep 2 is one piece of equipment he can use on a regular basis. We help him transfer onto the bike and then he works out independently. He really feels good about it and comes away from each session feeling at least some degree of independence and success.”

Yet another population that sees time on the BioStep 2 Elliptical at all Country Meadows communities is dementia care (memory support) residents. For this group, it is hard to overestimate the importance of simplicity and routine.

“When we elected to purchase the BioStep 2, we considered several competing machines but we kept coming back to this one.”

“Simplicity is key when it comes to keeping this population steady and active,” states Eichinger. “These folks are able to use the BioStep with ease because it doesn’t require complicated setups or a sequence of key strokes to get started. The motion is very rhythmic and intuitive. With minimal cuing, we can get them on the cycle and then simply remind them to keep pumping with their feet or arms. With just a little help and encouragement from our staff, these residents come away from using the BioStep feeling better about themselves.”

A Popular Choice

According to Eichinger, one feature that makes the BioStep 2 especially popular with the residents at Country Meadows is the fluid, low-impact elliptical motion achieved on this system. From a professional point of view, she really appreciates the thought that went into getting the ankle motion just right.



Residents can use the BioStep 2 to comfortably strengthen the primary muscles associated with balance, gait and mobility while also getting some cardio benefit.

“To be specific,” she clarifies, “I really appreciate the way that the ankle joint articulates when the BioStep is in use. It’s not kept in a fixed, flat-footed position. There’s a nice flow throughout the joint and I think that helps allow for a motion which really feels good to the residents. That natural motion, I think, is one reason so many residents tell us they like the ‘feel’ of this device. When we elected to purchase the BioStep 2, we considered several competing machines but we kept coming back to this one. It costs a little more than some other choices but it seemed to be better thought out and designed. For us, the extra cost has proved to be a good investment.”

To date, Country Meadows has purchased seven BioStep 2 Elliptical cross-trainers and Eichinger expects they’ll pick up a few more down the road. “It’s a staple here,” she said without hesitation. “Although we use it for many different applications we see general wellness as their primary role in our communities because our residents will stay on this device for a nice stretch of time. They’ll start by building up minutes on the system, then work on increasing resistance just as you or I might use a piece of equipment in the gym. Still, we are quick to cut this device into the protocol for anyone we think can benefit from its use.”

All this begs, of course, at the question of just how long an 85- or 90-year-old patient can stay engaged on the BioStep 2 Elliptical cross trainer.

“You would be amazed,” laughs Eichinger. “We’ve got one resident that props up her book, clips a tiny personal fan to the front of the unit, plugs in her ipod Shuffle, and cranks away for nearly an hour every day! Care, treatment and maintenance of our aging population is really changing for the better these days. Our residents no longer fear simple technology – they move in with laptops, cell phones and digital cameras. They want to stay socially active, maintain their strength and remain as independent as possible. Many also want to stave off a few pounds. These residents see time on this device as a step toward achieving those goals.”

As for a tip on incorporating the BioStep 2 into other community residence programs, Eichinger points out that it really helps if you can get the residents to buy-in to the idea before the device ever shows up in the clinic or fitness room.

“At one of our facilities,” she noted, “we actually took some residents to a showroom that had different pieces of fitness and medical equipment. We had them try the various devices, which gave us the chance to compare the benefits of competing models while helping our residents feel they had a voice in our decision. When the BioStep showed up in our fitness center, it already had a few fans.”

For more information on Biodex Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation devices, please contact:

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