

HealthSouth Lakeshore offers hope to patients following illness or injury

By Lori Pickett Culpepper

Recently, Emily Riser, M.D. saw a patient who faced extraordinary challenges. Two years had passed since the woman had experienced a stroke, and her condition had deteriorated badly.

"She couldn't sit up or transfer from the bed to a wheelchair," said Riser, a neurologist and director of the stroke program at HealthSouth Lakeshore Rehabilitation.

To many, this patient's situation seemed hopeless.

"But today, she is taking steps in our gym," Riser said. "I witness these kinds of things everyday."

The key to the success of this patient and others like her are individualized, specialized therapy programs. HealthSouth Lakeshore provides this care for patients recovering from injuries, illnesses and other complications, like strokes.

With effort, many of the patients can regain much of their strength, coordination and muscle use.

And, often there is hope, even for patients several years past an injury or illness, if the commitment is there to get better and follow a wellness plan.

HealthSouth Lakeshore sees people with traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury, neurological disorder or surgical intervention, such as hip or knee replacements.

"There's an entire range of injuries and illnesses that people survive in the acute care setting, but when it's time to leave, they need to come to rehab in order to maintain adequate mobility and self care so they can continue to get well at home," said HealthSouth Lakeshore Medical Director Paula Stewart, M.D.

Therapists teach patients how to compensate for losses they have experienced and how to recover.

"We help them maintain appropriate range of motion, build up strength in the muscles that

aren't functioning, practice proper positioning and pressure relief so that immobility doesn't occur and use proper nutrition," Stewart said. Patients can see and measure their progress daily as they set achievable goals, which she said is also important for recovery.

Stewart added that many times patients experience the "rehab effect," which happens when patients who feel devastated and hopeless about their own situation see how fortunate they actually are compared to others, and how lucky they are to be receiving such expert care.

"They have a team of therapists there to support them. We have psychologists, music therapists and speech therapists to help them work within their skill set. So, if they're talented in music, we use that to help them regain functions that have been lost," she said. "Using your skills and using something you love makes it so much easier."

But, the effort can't stop at the hospital.

"Patients and their families have to have buy in, and be committed to a wellness program," Riser added, noting continued success takes a lifetime commitment to maintaining good health.

Sometimes, the best successes are seen by patients who become involved in support groups at the hospital, like those for stroke patients or those dealing with Multiple Sclerosis.

It's this atmosphere that Stewart said makes Lakeshore so successful in its rehabilitation efforts.

"We've been providing rehab for so long and have deep, deep experiential roots in this building, so we have systems, equipment and therapists who work well together," she said. They are able to bring that experience to the patients as they interact and bring out the best in each other.

Lakeshore also focuses on education of the patient and family, because oftentimes there are completely new needs to be addressed, such as self-medication, feeding schedules, learning how to transfer from bed to wheelchair and prevention of future problems.

"Education is just as important as the therapy we provide to get people back to their home setting and back to the community," Stewart said. "We're about management, from when you enter the door, all the way through to reintegration into the community, which is the goal and the key difference with rehab medicine."

Upon leaving HealthSouth Lakeshore, patients are given a strategic plan for continued improvement, often including a specialized exercise plan, therapies and even medication. They come back in at strategic intervals to make sure they keep up the plan.

"We help to ensure compliance and support their efforts," Riser said.

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- Dr. Paula Stewart

