

HEALTH

Younger Patients in Nursing Homes

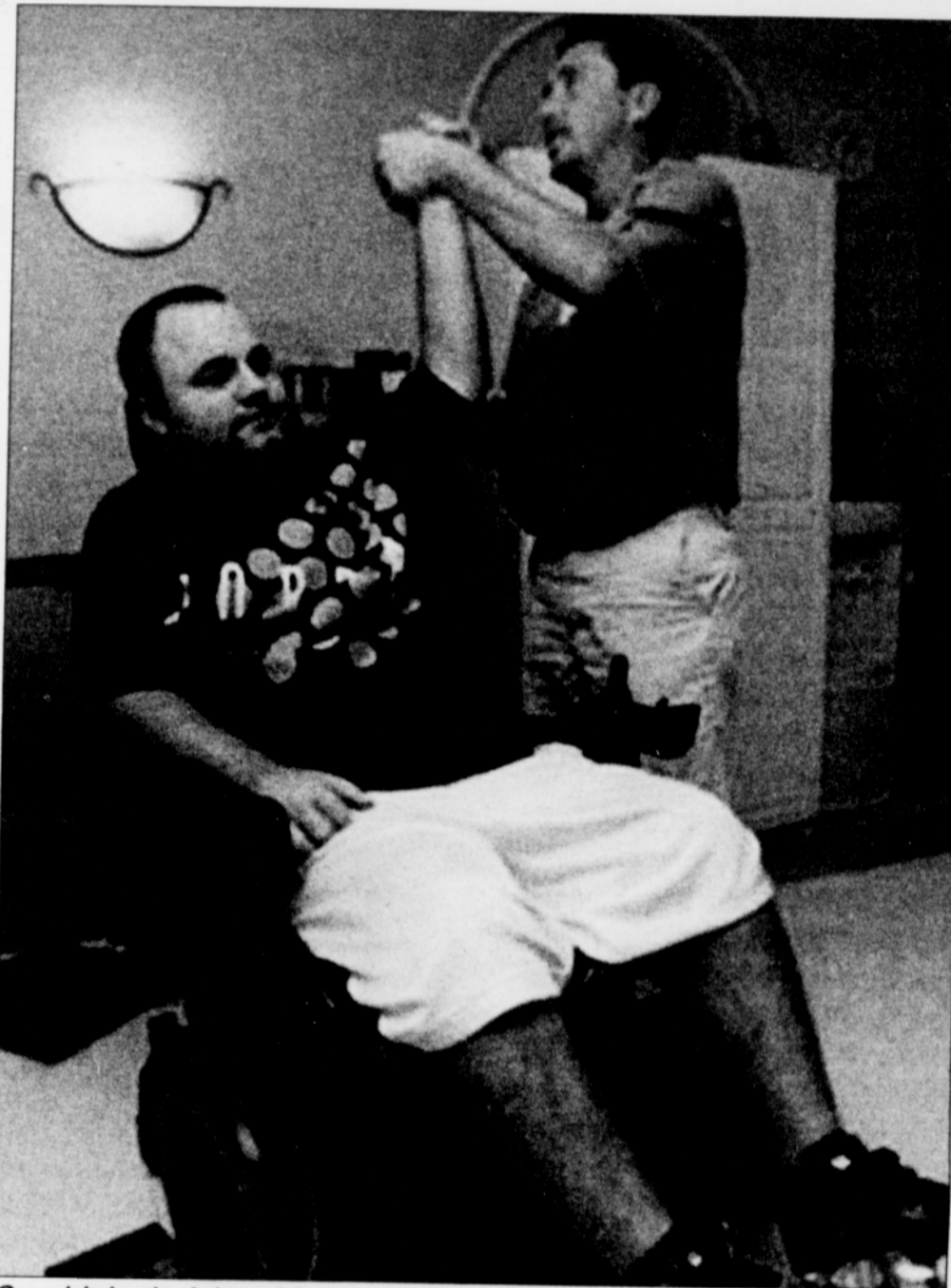
Growing numbers present host of challenges

(AP) — Adam Martin doesn't fit in here. No one else in this nursing home wears Air Jordans. No one else has stacks of music videos by 2Pac and Jay-Z. No one else is just 26.

It's no longer unusual to find a nursing home resident who is decades younger than his neighbor: About one in seven people now living in such facilities in the U.S. is under 65. But the growing phenomenon presents a host of challenges for nursing homes, while patients like Martin face staggering isolation.

"It's just a depressing place to live," Martin says. "I'm stuck here. You don't have no privacy at all. People die around you all the time. It starts to really get depressing because all you're seeing is negative, negative, negative."

The number of under-65 nursing home residents has risen about 22 percent in the past 8 years to about 203,000, according to an analysis of statistics from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. That number has climbed as mental health facilities close and medical advances keep people alive after they've suf-



Quadriplegic Adam Martin works with physical therapist Wes Bower at a Sarasota, Fla., rehabilitation center. About one in seven people now living in nursing homes in the U.S. are under 65. (AP photo)

fered traumatic injuries. Still, the overall percentage of nursing home residents 30 and younger is less than 1 percent.

Martin was left a quadriplegic when he was accidentally shot in the neck last year by his stepbrother. He spent weeks hospitalized before being released to a different nursing home and

eventually ended up in his current residence, the Sarasota Health and Rehabilitation Center in Sarasota, Fla. There are other residents who are well short of retirement age, but he is the youngest.

As Martin maneuvers his motorized wheelchair through the hallway, most of those he passes

have white hair and wrinkled skin.

Advocates who help young patients find alternatives to nursing homes say people are often surprised to learn there are so many in the facilities. About 15 percent of nursing home residents are under 65.

Federal law requires states to provide alternatives to institutional care when possible, though its implementation varies from place to place. Navigating the system can require a knowledgeable advocate and, sometimes, litigation.

Not all younger nursing home residents are there for good. Some nursing homes are seeing an increase in patients who come to recover there instead of in a hospital, because it is cheaper for their insurance company.

Like Martin, many younger residents have suffered a traumatic injury. Others have neuromuscular diseases such as multiple sclerosis, or have suffered a stroke.

The same generational tensions that exist outside nursing homes are inside them as well, and are sometimes exacerbated by the often close confines.

Older residents complain about loud music and visitors, younger residents complain

about living with someone with dementia or being served creamed spinach. Many nursing homes try to house younger residents together, though in many cases their small numbers make that difficult.

For young people who find themselves newly disabled, the psychological and social needs are often even more challenging than their physical demands. That presents a challenge for nursing homes that are used to serving people near the ends of their lives.

Still, many younger residents sink into depression because of their physical limitations, their loneliness and their nursing home surroundings.

Martin fears that may be true for him. He used to look forward to joining the Army and earning a college degree in science or engineering. Now he simply looks forward to visits from his friend Paul Tuttle, who on this day brings him nachos he feeds him along with sips of water.

"If I'm not here, he's got no one his age to talk to about football or anything," Tuttle says, wiping Martin's face.

Propped in his wheelchair, Martin says: "It makes you feel old. If that's all you're around, that's what you become."

Planning for Aging in Place

Seminar looks at home options

We all love our vintage homes and their charming features such as porches, stair step approaches, multiple stories, and staircases to the upper floors and basements. But as our houses age, so do we.

As anyone who has had a mobility-limiting accident, such as a broken leg knows, we quickly find how challenging it is to navigate into and around our houses.

Sometimes we think we need to move and that's not necessarily the case. "Aging in place" is a growing field of house modifications that can be made to let us comfortably remain in our houses.

A seminar that explores options for solving mobility limitations will be held Saturday, Jan. 29 from 10 a.m. to noon at the Architectural Heritage Center, 701 S.E. Grand Ave.

The focus is to learn about what modifications are available and how we might plan them without damaging the historic

features of our houses. There are good options — including ramps, stair transport systems, bathroom and kitchen improvements, and more.

Two presenters who are certified aging in place specialists with the Neil Kelly Company will cover lots of options available and highlight some case projects they have completed that maintain architectural character.

Pre-registration is strongly suggested by going to the website VisitAHC.org or calling 503-231-7264. Tickets are \$18.



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