

Physical therapy clinic thriving

By Rocky Wilson
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — A contingent of six physical therapists, most of them recent graduates of the University of Idaho and Eastern Washington University, are applying learned skills to provide healing to a rotating cast of Wallowa County patients who are suffering from age-related maladies, recovering from surgeries, or in some cases have been felled by sports-related injuries.

Routinely scheduled for one-hour treatments twice weekly are about 120 patients who enter the relatively new Parkway Health and Wellness Center just west of Wallowa Memorial Hospital to, in most cases, work one-on-one with therapists who oftentimes began their patient/therapist relationship via physician referral. Following such referrals, each individual is personally evaluated to determine a best strategy to match the patient's health needs with available treatments.

Cassandra Burns, the seventh employee in the depart-

ment whose duties range from physical therapy aide to receptionist to bookkeeper, agrees with Physical Therapy Director Aaron Gray that about 75 percent of all patients there come under the definition of Medicare patients. The remainder, Gray says, include post-surgical patients and a smaller number of persons recovering from sports injuries.

Burns says more often than not physical therapy patients seen at their site have secondary insurance to pay the extra 20 percent of treatment costs not covered by Medicare.

"We have pretty close to a full schedule," says Gray, meaning on most Mondays through Fridays the six therapists have all but one of their nine-hour work days filled with patient time and the other hour dedicated to paperwork. "We get more paperwork all the time," says Gray, noting the importance of documenting patient improvement to keep clients eligible to continue receiving insurance coverage.

The facility itself is designed with four one-on-one treatment rooms, a balance

room, Gray's office, a combined office for the remaining five therapists, reception space in which Burns works, and the relatively spacious gym area filled with a wide array of training equipment.

Two of the four treatment rooms are equipped with computer screens on which patients can view such things as their own MRI and other radiology-type images. If nothing else, these should help the patients become better educated about their respective physical health conditions. Each of the four rooms is equipped with height-adjustable beds. Manually, therapists apply modern instruments in those rooms to promote joint levelization, break down scar tissue, and introduce electrical stimulation to promote healing.

Possibly the most popular room of all is the balance room which, says Gray, "is a big hit with our patients, both young and old." The big attraction in the balance room is a Wii screen where patients can select from a wide menu of sporting activities and maneuver characters on a television screen simply by shifting weight on a balance board the patient stands on. Scores are evaluated by determining the average of distance and time traveled during five attempts of the game before the character "crashes."



Rocky Wilson/Chieftain

Patient Gary Wishart, under the watch of physical therapist Jean Schulz, strengthens his arms while operating the SciFit apparatus in the gym of Wallowa Memorial Hospital's physical therapy department.

Those scores, computed during maybe 15 to 30 minutes of guiding the balance board with a therapist standing

alongside, provide valuable information to therapists who have to document ongoing improvement in any patient's therapy program if that patient is to continue receiving coverage of that therapy through Medicare, or possibly through another insurance product. If patients reach a plateau and no longer improve in measurable health standards, insurance coverage goes away.

Like patients in the nearby hospital — who, along with hospice patients, receive regular visits from therapists on weekdays and weekends as

well — the goal is "to get them out the door as soon as possible. We want to get them independent with programs they can work on at home," says Gray.

The Wallowa County Health Care District recently inaugurated an aquatic program allowing Gray and some of his therapists to see and exercise patients in the pool at the Eagle's View Inn & Suites motel, just west of Enterprise. On two days per week, during two one-hour sessions each day, patients now are receiving therapy in that pool.

The Nature Conservancy is accepting applications for the position of Zumwalt Field Assistant.

The work includes treatment of invasive species, maintenance of facilities and equipment, management of recreational access, and a variety of other land management tasks on Nature Conservancy property. The position involves supervision of volunteers and frequent interaction with the public. This is a full time job scheduled to run from early April through the end of December, 2015. Compensation includes an hourly rate of \$13.50 plus benefits. For a complete job description application information go to <https://careers.nature.org> and search for Job ID 42821, or contact Justin Jones at jjones@tnc.org or 541-426-3271.



Applications must be received by February 27th, 2015.



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