

Rehab Realities

Sharing the Scoop on Alternative Rehabilitation Services with Nicholas Nilest, Dustin McArthur and Jacque Roberts

[Jody Joseph Marmel]

Due to a vast array of medical conditions, rehabilitation services are needed by many patients throughout the state. Depending on what the patient's needs are-these 3 highly respected professionals in the medical field share what their facility offers and how treatments differ to facilitate the recovery of the patients and educate the readers looking ahead.

Nicholas Nilest PT, DPT is the Chief Operating Officer at Corpus Christi Rehabilitation Hospital. Originally from Louisville, Kentucky where he attended Bellarmine University, Nick received his Bachelor of Health Sciences and Minor in Biology. He further continued his education and received a Doctorate in Physical Therapy. Board certified and licensed to practice physical therapy by the Texas State Board of Physical Therapy and Kentucky State Board of Physical Therapy, Nilest is also Neuro-IFRAH certified to treat and manage adults who have suffered a brain injury or stroke. Nick has worked in many different settings of healthcare including Outpatient, Short Term Acute Care, Long Term Acute Care, Skilled Nursing, Home Health, Inpatient Rehab and Home Health.

For six years, Nilest has been with Earnest Health System and in January of 2014, he accepted a position as the Chief Operating Officer of Corpus Christi Rehabilitation Hospital, the only free-standing rehabilitation inpatient facility in Corpus Christi. Earnest Health owns and operates 22 community-based acute rehabilitation and long-term acute care facilities in Texas and several other states. Its rehabilitative hospitals are consistently ranked in the top 10 percent nationally. "We are dedicated to providing high quality, cost-effective physical medicine and rehabilitation services to patients recovering from strokes, brain, spinal cord and orthopedic injuries and other impairments as a result of injury or illness as well as those with chronic or complex medical conditions. We promote a healing and nurturing environment at each of our facilities, responding to the medical, physical, psychological and social needs of our patients." At Earnest Health their philosophy is that therapy is not just physical; it is also a very emotional experience. Nilest adds, "Patients need a caring, highly trained and supportive team to maximize recovery and regain independence."

Earnest Health acquired the rehab hospital in July of 2013. It was renamed Corpus Christi Rehabilitation Hospital, a 35- bed inpatient rehab facility. The hospital is equipped to treat conditions ranging from amputations, arthritic conditions, brain injuries, burns, cancer, congenital deformity, hip fractures, joint replacement, post cardiac surgery, post general surgery, Parkinson's Disease, major trauma, pain management, pulmonary diseases such as COPD, spinal cord injuries, strokes, wounds and work-related injuries. This list is not a comprehensive one though. "We specifically have an amputee program and a stroke program that we are fine tuning in preparation for The Joint Commission's disease specific certification process," Nick says.

Nicholas Nilest explains acute rehabilitation in an inpatient rehabilitation center –Corpus Christi Rehabilitation Hospital. "Acute rehabilitation is an interdisciplinary process comprised of a team of clinicians that maximize the recovery process for patients that have impairments due to an illness or

injury. The goal of inpatient rehabilitation is to help the patient gain independence, promote safe home living, improve quality of life and reintegrate back into his or her community. In simple terms, acute rehabilitation programs are designed to help you return home at your highest level of independence.”

The rehabilitation process is different for everyone. Each patient has his/her own unique needs and goals for recovery. As such, an individualized plan of care is developed jointly by the patient, his/ her family and potential care givers and an interdisciplinary team of rehabilitation professionals. The treatment team incorporates treatment methods and technology to achieve the desired goals.

The ever so kind Nick Nilest explains the differences between inpatient rehabilitation and skilled nursing. “Inpatient Rehabilitative care facilities have certain requirements that skilled nursing facilities don’t have; an assessment from a rehab physician (physiatrist) at a minimum of three times a week, 15 hours or greater of physical therapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy weekly is required or 3 hours daily, and a weekly interdisciplinary team meeting is required. Three day acute care stay prior to admissions is not required. This means that the patient can be admitted to a rehab facility from anywhere, including home.”

Nilest wants to raise awareness of the different levels of rehabilitative care. There are so many divisions of healthcare these days that they often blur together and people have a difficult time understanding what their options are much less what the difference is. Any stay in the hospital is traumatic enough without all of the additional stress of trying to figure out what to do when discharged. “My goal is for people to feel empowered to ask questions and seek out answers before they are forced into it,” Nick says. People are more connected than ever via the internet and social media. They are starting to demand information and options about their care. “I want people to know the difference between rehab, skilled nursing, outpatient care and home health services. Healthcare is a buzzing industry and I want people to feel comfortable with discussing it. At some point in all of our lives we will be faced with a traumatic experience that forces us into the healthcare system. I want people to feel confident that when this happens, they are not scrambling to learn the difference between their options.”

Outpatient physical therapy is quite a different approach due to the nature of the patient’s vastly improved physical condition. Dustin McArthur, a former professional Corpus Christi IceRay hockey player, Official Physical Therapy provider of the RAYS and co-owner of Orthopedic Physical Therapy in Corpus Christi sheds the light on this type of physical therapy. Having been in physical therapy for 16 years, McArthur’s partner, Peter Schep has been a physical therapist in Corpus Christi for 26 years and has one of the “best reputations” in town.

“Our mission is to provide the best hands on, one on one care in Corpus Christi. We differentiate ourselves from our competition by treating every patient with hands on specialized care and with our extended hours of 7am to 7pm, we can accommodate anyone who needs appointments before or after school or work.”

After having had a great deal of physical therapy while being a professional hockey player, McArthur realized how valuable therapy was to people, including himself. McArthur created RYKE Physical Therapy and Sports Medicine from scratch prior to his ventures with Orthopedic Physical Therapy in Corpus Christi. For fourteen months, he slept on a mattress in one of the treatment rooms and within three years, RYKE Physical Therapy was the largest outpatient physical therapy provider in San Antonio. Before the company was four years old, McArthur sold it to a publicly traded company. Dustin attributes

his success in this venture to the ability to move quickly, act aggressively, work hard and demonstrate persistence as well as setting high standards. "I love the physical therapy business because of the great results you get to see your patients achieve. I am happy to be back in physical therapy and Corpus Christi as a part owner of Orthopedic Physical Therapy."

Orthopedic Physical Therapy provides physical therapy to people with all sorts of injuries whether they need surgery or not. "We see sprains and strains, sports injuries, work injuries, car accidents, pre and post operation and degenerative conditions."

In the outpatient setting, patients are now either at a higher function or are able to safely return home with some assistance. If they still need an intense amount of therapy, day rehab is an appropriate setting. Otherwise, they can return to an outpatient setting in a traditional manner. McArthur states, "In outpatient settings, the variety of our caseload is much different. You may see someone who is simply having back or neck pain or you can see someone who is still recovering from a stroke. Outpatient settings usually have a more orthopedic background, but there is still a need for therapists who work with neurological patients as well. In this setting, the therapist is often concerned with showing a patient how to self-manage certain musculoskeletal problems or helping them regain range of motion and other areas of concern." McArthur has plans; "we are looking to grow by adding another clinic in Corpus as well as adding clinics in surrounding areas."

Jacque Roberts, LNFA, Administrator at Trinity Towers joined the Air Force after high school where he became certified to work on aviation electronic systems on 4 fighter airframes and 1 cargo airframe. He was honorably discharged after 9 years of service. Roberts attended the College of Charleston in South Carolina and moved to Galveston to complete his internship and additional collegiate studies for Nursing Facility Administration. Roberts has been in Long Term Care Administration since 2011.

Trinity Towers is the name of the Continuous Care Retirement Community located in downtown Corpus Christi and the Holmgreen Center is the healthcare portion-memory care, assisted living and skilled nursing of the Trinity Towers property.

The Memory Care (Alzheimer's and Dementia Care) unit known as Clare Bridge provides care in a supportive environment. From the building design to the carefully selected staff and specialized programming, the focus is on the individual needs of each resident and family that they serve. Services are delivered by a four-step plan designed to help residents achieve daily moments of success.

"Our Assisted Living community develops care plans tailored to the specific needs and preferences of our residents. These patients need only minimum assistance with daily tasks such as dressing, bathing and medication management." This environment allows residents to live as independently as possible. By working closely with family members and personal physicians, they continually assess each resident and adjust services as necessary to meet their needs.

Skilled Nursing is composed primarily of rehabilitation following a hospitalization in which the acute care physician writes an order for rehabilitative services in Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy and Speech Language Pathology. "On our skilled floor, these patients enjoy private rooms most of which offer ocean views. While here, they are attended to 24 hours a day by a fully licensed staff. Everything from meals to laundry services are provided allowing them to focus only on their rehabilitation."

Occasionally patients will require a more permanent setting with 24 hour care so there is a long term care floor that caters to the specialized needs of these residents. Here, they are attended to by the same fully licensed staff but the therapy component is removed. These patients also enjoy private rooms and ocean views as well as a full schedule of activities tailored to their abilities and interests.

Roberts explains, "Skilled Nursing is the ideal setting for the post-acute patient who isn't able to safely return home and can't do more than 2.5 hours of therapy a day. As such, our primary demographic is the geriatric community but we do render services to people that are younger than 65 years old."

The way the three specialties of rehabilitation come together can be in several different ways as explained by Roberts. "Some stroke patients need a little bit of therapy and to let the brain rest for a time before they are able to tolerate extensive therapy so Nick might get the referral and realize this is the case. Then Nick will refer the patient to me for those initial few days. Once my team gets them to the 2.5 hour mark, I will refer the patient to Nick who will then take them to the next level of services. If it's safe for them to return home and do outpatient therapy, Nick will refer them to Dustin. There really is a myriad of avenues through the healthcare system within which a patient might go. The important thing that Nick, Dustin and I are look at is having the patient in the right setting at the right time. We are not going to 'hold' patients in a non-optimal setting for the means of revenue."

Roberts wants to grow the nursing staff in terms of clinical abilities and skill sets so that they can accept higher acuity patients. He will continue to climb the corporate ladder and if the right opportunity arises, he very well may transition into an owner/investor role.

"By spreading awareness about rehabilitative options proactively, we can save people from getting lost in the system or slipping through the cracks. Being a doctor of physical therapy, I could go on forever about the benefits of rehab. They are endless. My vision is not just for the coastal bend area, nor Texas, but for national and international recognition on how life changing rehabilitative care can be. It can literally mean the difference between life and death. Studies show that with a quick stay at an inpatient rehab facility prior to discharging home, readmission rates to the hospital are far less, level of function is far greater and mortality rates actually decrease compared to those who didn't receive rehab," details Nick.

To speak knowledge-that is the ultimate goal. These three men have similar goals and work together to ensure that the patients are receiving the rehab services needed in order to get each patient to optimal functioning levels so that they can resume their lives and enjoy the 'quality of life' to its fullest. By empowering people to learn about their rehabilitative options proactively is what these three fine men are doing and as a result they are reducing the burden of having to learn reactively. Knowledge is power and in the medical field every bit of knowledge one can acquire can help the vast majority in the long run.

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