‘Visitors’ Changing Lives One Story at a Time

It’s hard to imagine being able to walk away from an accident or medical trauma, only to discover you have a brain injury. Memory loss, personality differences and physical impairments can all be part of recovering from such traumas and all forms of brain injury caused by a stroke, aneurysm, abscess, tumor, disease, anoxia, bleeds, surgery, etc. Until now, patients and families have had few resources to deal with these issues.

But the caring hearts of NCH volunteers and staff at NCH Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging & Rehabilitation are changing that with the Brain Injury Peer Visitor Association, which has been in place since August. It was developed at the urging of Brookdale Administrative Director Heather Baker and NCH Director of Volunteers Amanda Smith.

Christopher Thomas is one of the first brain injury peer visitors in the NCH program. The gifted artist survived a motor vehicle accident several years ago. Now, after NCH Rehab Case Manager Lois McSweeney-Ventura identifies a patient who can benefit from the program, Thomas is one of the visitors who shares his story and answers questions.

“Patients and their families will say after an injury, ‘Well I’m walking and I’m talking, so I must be okay,’ but that is not often the case,” says Thomas, who was hit head-on by another motorist. “It is like waking up a different person and trying to remember the person you were.”

The Brain Injury Peer Visitor Association was founded and inspired by Brain Injury Peer Visitor and Association Director Ann Boriskie. Her involvement stems from her own brain injury. Like Chris, she survived a tragic accident, later realizing her brain injury.

“When Amanda and Heather first started talking to me, I could tell they were really committed; and the Brookdale Center is very loving and warm, but incredibly professional,” says Boriskie, who traveled from Georgia to train the NCH peer visitors. “People like Chris and I didn’t get brain injury help and we had to find our way out into the world—our job as peer visitors is to make it easier and immediately educate the patient and families.”

Part of the program includes a packet of information.

Baker and Smith hope the community will come together to support the growth of the program.

Massage Therapy – More Than Relaxation

Often considered only a luxurious way to self-pamper, relax the body and refresh the spirit, massages performed by NCH licensed massage therapists offer so much more.

One of five licensed massage therapists at the NCH Whitaker Wellness Center, Diana Byington, LMT, explained the dynamics of therapeutic massage and the invigorating feeling one can experience.

“Our muscles are made of fibers and threads that occasionally stay contracted due to injury, stress, poor posture or working habits as well as emotional or physical fatigue that result in the feeling of a tense knot,” she explained. “The pressure of massage increases circulation, oxygen and nutrient delivery to a muscle. This allows the fibers to separate and the knot is untangled, allowing fluids to move in and wastes to move out. The threads stretch and relax, producing that great, relieved feeling.”

Jennifer Phaneuf, LMT said that it is the increase of serotonin and dopamine levels that impart that feeling of well-being, and that massage affects every system in the body.

“We also incorporate stretching to open the joint and pull the muscles down from the shoulders. With regular massage sessions, muscles become accustomed to manipulation and that keeps them limber and enables them to more easily release toxins,” she said.

The therapists offer four main types of massages: therapeutic back and neck massage (25 minutes), therapeutic full body massage (50 minutes), a deep tissue massage (75 minutes) and a pregnancy massage (50 minutes) that includes pre-natal and pregnancy massages performed up to a few weeks before the due date.

Phaneuf said that most clients prefer a combination of a deep tissue and the light, Swedish-style massage in which the two modalities are incorporated during a relaxing and re-vitalizing 50 minute session.

Other types of massages include an abdominal massage which favorably affects the digestive system and massage therapy for patients who have certain cancers, have certain skin conditions, or auto-immune diseases like lupus, she added.

Wellness Center members as well as non-members may schedule appointments for massages from Monday-Friday (9 a.m.-8 p.m.) and Saturday-Sunday (9 a.m.-3 p.m.).

For more information call The Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging and Rehabilitation at (239) 552-7222.

TOP 10 BENEFITS OF MASSAGE THERAPY

- Improves circulation
- Calms nervous system
- Stimulates lymphatic system
- Helps relieve sleep disorders
- Reduces inflammation
- Increases blood cell count
- Boosts the immune system
- Reduces tension and anxiety
- Decreases illness-related fatigue
- Assists in pain management of arthritis and sciatica

For more information call the Whitaker Wellness Center at (239)596-9200 or the Briggs Wellness Center at (239) 624-2750 or visit www.nchmd.org/wellness or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/nchwellness.