All Rehabilitation Facilities Are Not Created Equal

By Kevin Caffrey

As patients who have experienced a debilitating injury or joint replacement procedure and their families know, the rehabilitation facility they utilize can impact the prospects for reclaiming a normal life. Finding a facility that best suits a patient’s needs can be a challenge for family members faced with decisions they have had little time to research.

“Rehabilitation facilities are not something people investigate until there is a need,” said Heather Baker, Administrative Director of NCH Healthcare System’s Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging & Rehabilitation in North Naples. “Family members often have little time to prepare and end up making decisions during a time of crisis. It can be overwhelming. Each patient must be assessed based on his or her unique situation to determine the appropriate level of care. The patient’s needs must fit the capabilities of the facility.”

Two levels of care for in-patient rehabilitation are typically explored. The first is acute rehabilitation performed in a rehabilitation hospital. The second is care provided in a skilled nursing facility. The goal is to improve function capabilities so patients are ready to return home and to minimize the possibility of complications.

“The care at an acute rehabilitation hospital like Brookdale includes daily medical management, access to testing, imaging, labs and an array of medical staff services,” said Baker. “Conditions are monitored and managed with tight control. Physical, occupational and speech therapy, cognition and adaptation to residual impairments can all be part of the regimen. Acute rehabilitation hospitals offer the most intensive and aggressive type of therapy available. Not every patient is ready for that. We have admissions criterion that help us determine if the patient is right for us versus another setting.”

Different resources are available to patients and family members seeking an appropriate rehabilitation setting. The National Stroke Association offers a guide that outlines the levels of care provided by different facilities. This “comparative shopping guide” enables families to tour a facility, interview staff members and to ascertain the capabilities of a variety of providers.

“That information can certainly help patients and families make an educated decision,” said Baker. “It is also important to know if a facility is accredited by CARF International. CARF establishes the standards of practice for rehabilitation providers worldwide. Brookdale and other facilities and organizations accredited by CARF have fully embraced a commitment to continuous improvement and the implementation of quality measures to ensure a superior level of patient care and outcomes.”

Checklist for finding an Excellent Program

- Has the program been in operation at least one year?
- Does the program have a formal system for evaluating the progress made by its patients and the overall outcomes of the stroke rehab program?
- Does the program have any partners that offer rehab services at other levels of care that I may eventually need (day treatment, outpatient treatment or home care)?
- Does the program provide a wide range of therapy services? (physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy?)
- Does the program have on staff a full-time physiatrist or another doctor who is experienced in stroke and rehab medicine?
- Is medical care available at the rehab center if I need it?
- Can my doctor visit me at the rehab center? (Does he/she have visiting privileges?)
- Does the program have a stroke support group for survivors and their families? If not, can they refer me to a local group?
- Does the program use outside groups (such as consumer advocacy groups) to get ideas for serving disabled people?
- Does the program conduct home visits before checking people out of the center and releasing them to their homes?
- Are staff members required to keep up with new information about stroke and rehabilitation? How do they do so?

Source: www.stroke.org

Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging and Rehabilitation
Physical Therapist Patti Governile works with patient Dick Cameron and his wife Susan Cameron.