



ABILITY REHAB ASSOCIATES HELPING PATIENTS REALIZE THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

By Harry Burkett

Imagine all the obstacles that an individual must overcome after a serious car accident, severe head injury, or sudden stroke. Or what about all of the people who deal with chronic degenerative conditions or who are born with disabilities? Not surprisingly, it takes a well-coordinated effort to help patients through the complex issues related to recovery: physical rehabilitation, psychological support, and any concurrent medical conditions.

For example, a patient admitted to an intensive care unit for a spinal cord injury will remain in an acute-care facility for a certain length of time, followed by a stay in an acute or subacute rehabilitation center. Outpatient and homecare options may also become part of the recovery plan. Whatever the scenario, the ultimate goal is to help the patient reach his or her maximum level of function and self-sufficiency, preferably in the home setting.

Ability Rehab Associates helps patients realize that goal. In 1992, Dr. Gunnar W. Zorn III became the first physiatrist to practice at Peninsula Regional Medical Center in Salisbury, Md. What is a physiatrist? He or she is a physician who specializes in physical medicine and rehabilitation. While the roots of the specialty can be traced back to the 1930s, it rose to prominence when young veterans arrived home from World War II with a range of injuries. Indeed, it was in the national interest for those veterans to be rehabilitated so they could maximize their potential in the workforce and society. Likewise, the Vietnam War furthered physiatry as an important specialty.

When Dr. Zorn began his practice on the Eastern Shore, he realized the need for a physiatrist in the region was long overdue. Many patients had to travel to Baltimore or Philadelphia for care, or, in some cases, their needs weren't being met at all. To deal with the increasing demand, Dr. Jeffrey W. Anderson joined Dr. Zorn in 1994 and, together, they formed Ability Rehab Associates. Both physicians specialize in general rehabilitation and musculoskeletal disorders, and are board-certified in electrodiagnostic medicine.

In addition, Dr. Zorn is the medical director at HealthSouth Chesapeake Rehabilitation Hospital. Drs. Zorn and Anderson also serve as co-medical directors of Peninsula Regional Medical Center's therapy department and provide medical leadership for the facility's transitional care unit. More recently, the practice has joined the staff at Anchorage Nursing & Rehabilitation Center and Manokin Manor Nursing & Rehabilitation Center to provide medical rehab directorship for its inpatient rehab programs.

Currently, Ability Rehab has offices at Peninsula Regional Medical Center and HealthSouth Chesapeake Rehabilitation Hospital, both in Salisbury, Md. Acute hospital consultation is provided at PRMC and Atlantic General Hospital in Berlin, Md. Acute inpatient rehab is provided at HealthSouth Chesapeake Rehabilitation Hospital. The practice also assists with the care of rehab patients at Salisbury Center Genesis ElderCare, Deer's Head Center, and other facilities throughout the region.

"We pride ourselves in following patients from the point of initial injury, to the point they are able to maximize functional independence and are best equipped to handle their 'ADLs,' otherwise known as activities of daily living," explained Dr. Zorn. "Even routine

surgical treatments, such as knee or hip replacements, require comprehensive plans of care. With people growing older and hospital stays becoming shorter, it's important to carefully coordinate the various levels of the recovery process, from immediate postoperative rehab to outpatient follow-ups. By being on staff with various providers within the community, we are able to follow our patients through the rehab process and improve continuity of care.”

The physiatrists at Ability Rehab are the physician leaders of a much bigger interdisciplinary team, which may include other medical specialists—in addition to physical, occupational, speech, recreational, and respiratory therapists, nurses, prosthetists, psychologists, case managers, and social workers—to set common goals for each patient.

“We utilize the interdisciplinary approach for any case, whether it is a traumatic life-changing event like a stroke or car accident, or a chronic condition such as cerebral palsy,” commented Dr. Anderson. “And, as physiatrists, we manage that patient’s totality of care. We are advocates for these patients. It is true that recovery can be a slow process and that you may not immediately see the results of your labor. But, as a physician, there’s nothing more rewarding than seeing a patient make progress and get back to what they love doing. For example, a person struggling in the parallel bars in rehab, learning to use an artificial limb, may be out playing golf or taking a grandchild fishing within a few months. We never lose sight of a patient’s full potential or personal goals.”

Ability Rehab has inpatient and outpatient programs to address stroke, brain injury, spinal cord injury, amputation, hip and knee surgery, multi-trauma, arthritis, back and neck pain, osteoporosis, cancer, heart and lung problems, and carpal tunnel syndrome. In addition, Ability Rehab provides specialty services for musculoskeletal disorders, neuromuscular diseases, workers’ compensation, disability evaluations, impairment ratings, independent medical evaluations, spasticity management, acupuncture, electrodiagnostic testing, and personal injury.

As the practice has grown, it has become possible to provide more specialized care. Dr. Zorn, for example, has more time to devote to his special interest, geriatric rehabilitation. Dr. Anderson conducts a weekly clinic for patients with severe spasticity secondary to injury or disease of the brain or spinal cord. Advanced treatment options for these often severely disabled patients include oral medications, Botox injections to relax tight muscles, or possibly an implanted pump to deliver medication directly to the spinal cord.

Other physicians, all certified by the American Board of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation, have joined Ability Rehab in recent years. They include Dr. Kristie Y. Kim, specializing in musculoskeletal disorders and the use of medical acupuncture, and Dr. Howard A. Gilmer, also with an interest in musculoskeletal disorders as well as pain management and worker compensation cases. Dr. Mandip Parmar, who recently completed his training at Johns Hopkins University, will join the team this summer. Indeed, Ability Rehab is able to flourish because of its professional and caring staff. Other staff members include two physician assistants, Heidi E. Collier, PA-C, MSW, and Juan C. Zelaya, PA-C, as well as Kellie Fox, CRNP, a certified nurse practitioner, Judith Wroten, RN, and rehab liaison Julia Tull.

“Basically, we’d like to educate the community about what physiatrists do, and how we can improve the quality of their care should they need it,” said Dr. Zorn. “The earlier we become involved in a patient’s case, the more of a difference we can make.”

To contact Ability Rehab, call 410-543-7065 at the PRMC office or 410-219-5530 at the HealthSouth Chesapeake Rehabilitation Hospital location. Remember, Ability Rehab can help you maximize what you CAN do!