The medical specialty of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation (physiatry) has somewhat of an identity crisis. A recent poll of the public revealed that the vast majority of people are unaware of this specialty and the role physiatrists play in improving the care of patients with chronic and/or disabling medical conditions. Physiatry is one of the smaller medical specialties with only about 7,000 board certified physiatrists in the country. Also, given the nature of their practices, physiatrists tend to be concentrated in the bigger cities with few practicing in more rural areas.

Physiatrists are trained to focus on the whole person, and strive to help patients to improve not just their health but also their daily functioning and quality of life. Physiatrists care for patients with acute and chronic pain related to conditions such as tendonitis and fibromyalgia or musculoskeletal problems that cause back and neck pain. They also treat people who have experienced catastrophic events resulting in paraplegia, quadriplegia, or traumatic brain injury, and individuals who have had strokes, other neurological disorders and orthopedic injuries.

Meriter’s Physical Medicine and Rehab Program has developed three outreach clinics in partnership with local hospitals to increase the end access to physiatry services in south-central Wisconsin. Dr. William Fowler has been staffing an outreach clinic at the Sauk Prairie Memorial Hospital for many years. Dr. Courtney Hogendorn provides physiatry services at the Upland Hills Health Center in Dodgeville, and since fall of 2005, Dr. William Shannon attends an outreach clinic at the Watertown Memorial Hospital. The physiatrists help to coordinate care through therapy consultation, medication and medical equipment prescription, and patient education. These outreach clinics not only improve convenience for many patients, they have also helped in the coordination of care with the local health care providers. The physiatrists strive to work closely with primary care physicians, local therapists and other health care providers.

With these outreach efforts, we hope the public’s awareness of this valuable medical specialty will increase. If you have questions regarding Meriter’s physiatry outreach clinics or physiatry services in general, please call (608) 267-6175 or 1-800-236-6175.
A Puzzle a Day Keeps Dementia Away!

It is well known that regular physical activity promotes cardiovascular health. But did you know participating in intellectual leisure activities benefits the mind and may reduce the risk of dementia? Some activities included in a 21-year research study were: reading, playing board games, writing for pleasure, doing crosswords or playing a musical instrument. Ballroom dance was the only physical activity found to lower risk for dementia, possibly due to the higher cognitive demand in remembering more complex dance steps and keeping in time with music.

Frequent participation in intellectual leisure activities was found to be even more beneficial. The study noted above found that senior citizens who worked crossword puzzles four or more days a week were 47% less likely to develop dementia than those who did puzzles only once a week. Mildly challenging puzzles require concentration, attention, memory, problem solving and flexibility of thought. A sense of accomplishment and personal satisfaction comes from solving the puzzle and filling in the last square.

Using crossword puzzles, board games or other activities can be effective for improving present skills or learning new skills because they can be fun and are out of the usual structure associated with learning. If enjoyable to the individual, some of these activities may be helpful in therapy or as a new leisure interest following a stroke, injury to the brain or major injury or illness. To avoid frustration, it may be necessary to start at an easier level, use other resources to determine solutions, such as a dictionary or even the answers to a puzzle. Using resources such as a dictionary may be a valuable learning tool. Realizing over time that one is relying less on “cheating” or looking up answers can be encouraging and motivating.

A variety of sources can provide an abundance of puzzles from simple to most challenging. Look in the daily newspaper, magazines or web sites on the internet, the bookstore or even periodical subscriptions. Newspaper puzzles sometimes get harder from the beginning to the end of the week. When a level is successfully completed, one often looks forward to the next puzzle and challenge, adding to the addictive quality of the activity.

Just as we need to carefully select a physical fitness program to meet our needs, we should select a mentally stimulating and challenging activity that we will enjoy and participate in often.

Day Rehab Welcomes New Staff

Two new faces join the Day Rehabilitation Center team. Lindsey Bollig, Occupational Therapist, has worked at Meriter for three years in the acute care, inpatient rehab and GROW programs. She comes to DRC with a wide range of skills and the comprehensive care focus to help patients fine tune their daily living skills. Tracy Bovre, Physical Therapist, has been a part of the inpatient rehabilitation scene for over 10 years and joins Day Rehab with a wealth of knowledge to help patients move to that next level of independence and regain the strength, balance and confidence that community living requires.
With Gratitude to the GROW Program Staff

Meriter will close the GROW program by May 1, 2006 as a result of State Budget Bill changes in how Medical Assistance (Medicaid) authorizes and reimburses hospital-based outpatient therapies. Medicaid patients comprise approximately 85% of GROW patients.

Medicaid representatives believe community support or day treatment programs can provide the types of services offered through GROW. In addition to services provided through Meriter, GROW patients are currently involved with other care providers. We will work with these agencies, upon request, to provide training and other materials that allow them to integrate functional living skills programming into their services. We will provide services free of charge during this period as we work to transition our patients.

The program has provided reintegration services through an occupational therapy model for 30 years for patients with mental health, physical and or emotional disabilities. We are grateful to GROW staff members who, through the years, have provided an excellent service with very positive outcomes.

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Inpatient Rehab: A continuing interview...

The Rehab Connection interviewed Dr. William Shannon, Physiatrist and Kathy Knapp, Therapies Manager for the inpatient Rehab Unit (3North) at Meriter about 2005 accomplishments and 2006 initiatives. Part of this interview was included in the last issue. This is the continuation of that article.

The Rehab Unit made a major shift in 2005 and began accepting orthopedic patients from medical floors at Meriter as part of the Human Motion Institute project. How has this helped your staff to grow and add to their skills?

WS: Admitting more orthopedic patients to 3North has helped staff, including physiatrists, develop skills in management of joint related disorders and pain. The process has helped the rehabilitation team become more efficient, given the typical short length of stay of these patients and their rapidly changing status.

What new ideas do you have in 2006 that will help Meriter’s Rehab Unit continue to be a leader in the community?

WS: We have developed a Post-Stroke Clinic that will assist us in continuing the excellent care started in inpatient rehabilitation. This clinic will provide an interdisciplinary assessment of a stroke patient’s medical and rehabilitation needs six months or more after the initial treatment.

KK: We continue to keep up with the CARF standards in the years between CARF certification visits. Our unit is also an ad hoc member of Meriter’s “Get With The Guidelines” stroke care initiative. This will improve patients’ access to a fuller continuum of stroke care.

WS: The Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation physiatrists now have outreach clinics in Prairie du Sac, Dodgeville and Watertown. The PM&R program will continue to build on initiatives to improve patient and staff safety in 2006.
We say farewell to our long time volunteer, Murphy, a yellow Labrador, who passed away in January. Murphy and owner Lynn Malayter helped countless people find joy and inspiration during their inpatient and outpatient therapies. Murphy will be greatly missed. We will treasure the stories, pictures and memories of her many years of service at Meriter.

On a happier note, a new pet face in rehab is Emma, a smooth collie, who has taken on the role of friendly visitor in the hours after the demanding rehab schedule winds down. Emma and her owners, Sue and Ken Christman, comfort, cheer and reassure the patients on 3 North. Welcome, Emma!

For the past seven years Abby, a black Labrador, and owner Joan Foeste have helped patients in Day Rehab, 3North and Pediatrics set and accomplish goals through resourceful activities. We look forward to Abby and Joan’s continued involvement.

Murphy, Abby and Emma have left many lasting paw prints on the hearts of Meriter patients. The Meriter Rehab Department is fortunate to have such great volunteers!