

Seminar focus on stroke therapy

HealthSouth Rehabilitation Hospital and MSL Associates covered stroke therapy and devices that assist.

By LOIS HANNA
Hernando Today correspondent

Technology! Ain't it great! When it works, that is. On June 21, Charles M. Dempsey, M.D., medical director of HealthSouth Rehabilitation Hospital of Spring Hill, had his Power Point presentation all ready for a standing-room-only audience in the Hernando Medical Park conference room. The topic was "New Technology in Stroke Treatment."

The room was darkened and the projector turned on. There was a title page. The projector flashed a message that the planned slide sequence was unavailable. That guy Murphy and his Law were alive and well. The computer technology had flopped.

As the room filled up, many guests had shown signs of the neurological impairment that can result from strokes. With walkers, canes, speech difficulties and the host of other stroke left-overs, they needed to know what's new in rehab possibilities. Dempsey knew they were full of questions and hope.

So the physician turned his agenda upside down and invited the audience to begin the show with their own questions.

Early Q&A

Q: Why does my wife have times when she's clear-thinking and other times when she seems foggy?

A: These foggy times may be associated with TIAs — transient ischemic attacks. This means that a small clot has created a blockage in blood flow.

It may also indicate blood pressure problems. Or it may be an after-effect of the stroke.

Q: Why does my wife have shoulder pain when she lifts her stroke-affected arm?

A: The shoulder is different from the hip, in that it has a shallow socket. The ball is kept in place with muscles. Because these muscles can't do their job well, the shoulder subluxes — that is, it drops down from the socket. It's a painful condition.

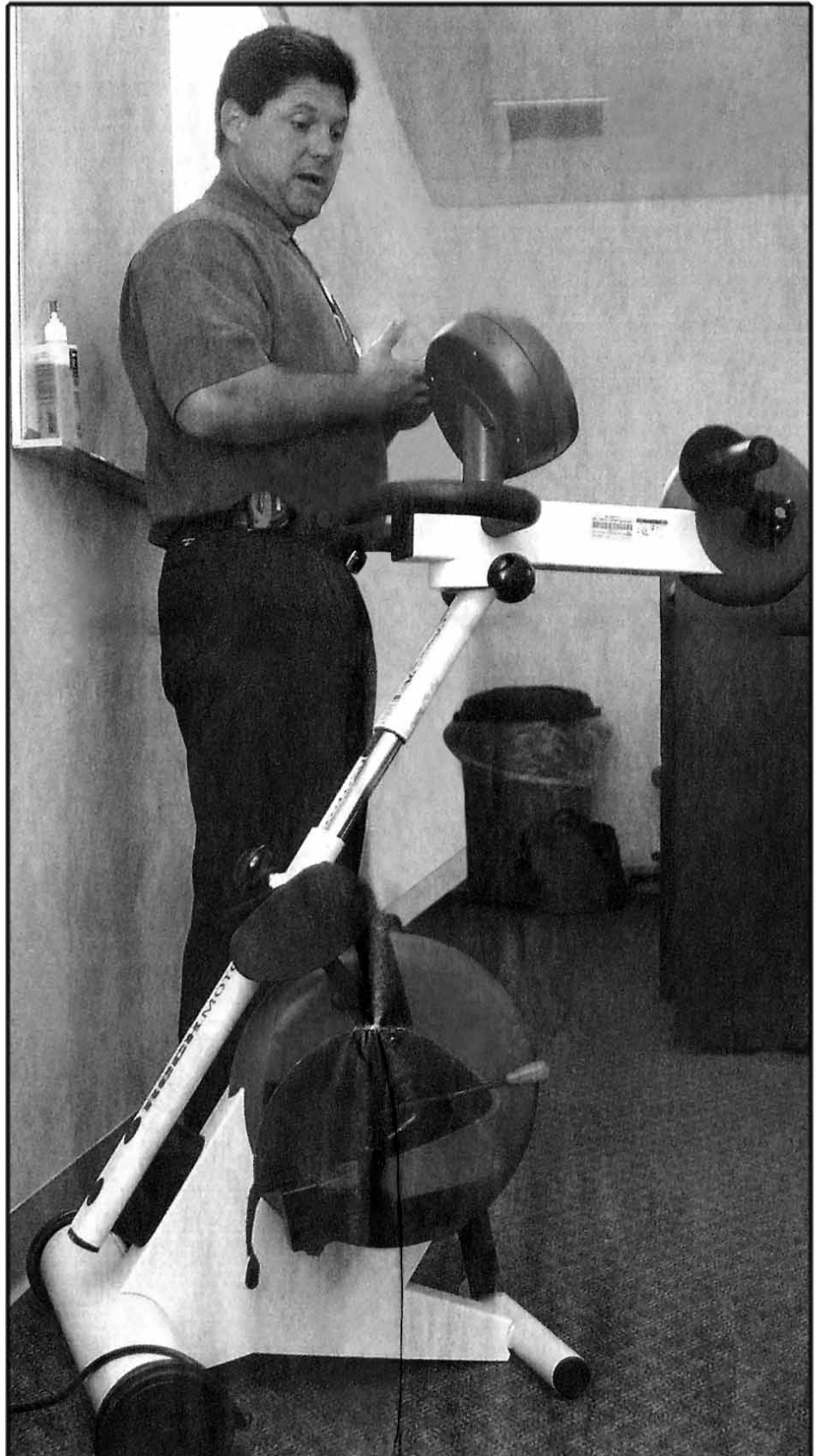
Q: Does electric stimulation help?

A: Yes, it can help.

Q: Explain about the slurred speech that happens sometimes, and not other times.

A: The language center is on the left side of

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Staff photos by BOB EAST III

LEFT: Dr. Charles Dempsey from HealthSouth talks about stroke recovery treatment at Hernando Medical Park Wednesday. **ABOVE:** David Monceaux of MSL Associates describes how the Reck MotoMed movement therapy machine can help stroke patients. The German-made machine assists patients in performing repetitive movements of their legs or hands and arms. Monceaux is the local dealer for the device.

STROKE TREATMENT

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the brain. That's the dominant side. If the stroke is centered in this area, speech can be impaired. If the stroke is on the right side of the brain, speech may be clearer, and may be almost completely restored.

Q: Is it still thought to be true that improvement after a stroke is limited to what's gained in the first six months?

A: No. Improvement comes most quickly in the first six months, but can continue more slowly for an indefinite time. Therapy can still be useful, if it can be approved by the patient's insurance.

Not quite in the background, conference room host Damadur Kanuri, administrator of the Endoscopy and Surgery Center, took over the rebellious equipment and restored some data gradually.

Motomed — a new concept in therapy

As questions slowed down a bit, David Monseaux of MSL Associates, Inc., became a co-presenter, demonstrating a therapy device which is in use at HealthSouth and bringing good results in patients who are becoming able to walk and to use their arms more effectively.

With the assistance of a computer which takes over when muscles weaken, the patient is led to practice increasing use of arms and legs.

A serious holdup in therapy can come when affected limbs become spastic. They tighten up powerfully and painfully, and can no longer manage the tasks they did before the stroke.

The machine can adjust to spastic movements, carrying through with an effective movement and teaching the user ways to bring the spastic muscles under better control.

If the user tires, the machine can take over and complete the movements that are being relearned.

In answer to questions from the audience, Monseaux said that this device is catching on, and is becoming accepted by insurance companies.

It's expected to become available for home use. See www.motomed.com. This is a German-built device, becoming very popular in the US.

By this time, three Power-point segments had been resuscitated.

They show three more new devices that Health South is using to help its patients

restore their physical functioning after accident and disease.

Vita-Stim Therapy

Stroke frequently disables the nerves that control swallowing muscles, bringing a condition known as dysphagia. The supplier's brochure says that it's the "only dysphagia therapy backed by compelling clinical data and cleared by the Food and Drug Administration."

The brochure explains, "An estimated 15 million Americans are afflicted with dysphagia, a condition that causes discomfort or difficulty swallowing. At its most severe — when patients entirely lose their ability to eat — dysphagia can profoundly disrupt a life."

VitaStim therapy uses small electrical currents to stimulate the muscles responsible for swallowing. Trained specialists help patients re-educate their muscles.

A small current is carefully delivered by specially designed electrodes. It stimulates motor nerves in the throat. The muscles responsible for swallowing contract, and the quality of swallowing function improves.

AutoAmbulator

Stroke commonly results in one-sided paralysis or weakness.

Frequently, there's impaired mobility and difficulty with ADLs — that's "activities of daily living" which include eating, toileting, bathing, dressing and transferring. That last means getting oneself from one place to another — like from wheelchair to bed. They're pretty basic.

But where there's ADL impairment, quality of life suffers mightily.

The AutoAmbulator is a type of treadmill, like cake is a type of bread. The user's body weight is supported while working out, and the legs are guided as rhythmic motion. The benefits are listed: "Enhances neurological recovery — neuroplasticity; Provides neurologically injured patients the opportunity to experience early, safe, upright posture and efficient gait patterns."

The AutoAmbulator collects and records data, including distance, number of steps, time ambulated, speed, and weight bearing (left and right side).

SaebFlex

Here's something for the hands. A mechanical glove is fitted over the affected hand. It assists the hand and fingers in the movements that are natural to a hand — opening, closing, grasping, turning

loose.

According to material found on www.saebo.com/seaboflex.html, this is a revolutionary new rehab device that assists neurologically impaired individuals with opening their hand for grasp and release activities that would otherwise be impossible. The SaebFlex is a dynamic splint that features a spring-loaded system. In addition, the SaebFlex is non-electrically based and is purely mechanical.

Leftover Q&A

Toward the end of the presentation, it was becoming evident that some of the planned material wouldn't be shown. But it wasn't needed. There were a couple of questions, though.

Q: What about acupuncture for people recovering from stroke?

A: Acupuncture relieves pain. But it can't heal a brain. Used for pain treatment, it can be helpful.

Q: What about a TENS unit?

A: This is another method which works for relieving pain. But this electrical stimulation can't bring improvement in function when the condition originates in the brain.

Q: What about hyperbaric (oxygen under pressure) treatment for stroke?

A: We don't have experience with this. For stroke there wouldn't be a big difference, long-term.

Dempsey asked participants to watch for HealthSouth's upcoming presentation on services to amputees.

About HealthSouth

HealthSouth is a rehabilitation hospital. Dempsey says that their patients come for care and intensive therapy because of stroke, brain injury, spinal cord injury, Parkinson's Disease, Multiple Sclerosis, Guillian-Barre Syndrome, orthopedic conditions, balance difficulties and many other conditions. It's not a nursing home, a place primarily for nursing care.

He says that the greatest difficulty in planning therapy for Medicare patients is the limitation Medicare places on time allocations for a patient. While stays of a determined length are approved for stroke, the patient evaluation may bring an authorization for less time.

However, stroke patients are commonly unable to benefit from intensive therapy in the first few days or weeks. The authorization may end at the time therapy can be most effective.

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