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Life in Discovery

For Immediate Release:

Rosalind Franklin University Physical Therapy Students Learn from and Serve Local Residents at new Neuro Clinic



Waukegan resident Mike Konobeck and Cara Narbone, DPT student.

NORTH CHICAGO, IL – Waukegan resident Mike Konobeck was getting ready for work one morning when he began to feel disoriented.

“I knew I was having a stroke,” Konobeck said.

Konobeck just had time to call 911 before he collapsed and fell into a coma.

He was 44 years old.

“I was in a coma for five days. When I woke up I was completely paralyzed,” Konobeck said. “I spent 58 days in the hospital.”

That was 12 years ago. Konobeck ticks off the date and time of his stroke, the number of days he spent in the hospital, the number of days he spent in rehab. And he remembers the day that his therapist told him that his insurance for physical therapy had run out.

Now Konobeck, who still struggles with weakness in his left arm and leg, is back in physical therapy through a new Neurological Clinic community outreach program at Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science.

Students in the university’s doctor of physical therapy (DPT) program are working with patients in an innovative program that offers therapy to people with disabilities related to neurological disorders. It provides students with hands-on experience including the responsibility of patient care, treatment progression, and communication with patients and care givers.

Additionally it offers volunteer patients in the community, with chronic conditions and insurance limitations, continued physical therapy services.

“Many DPT students go into physical therapy with the plan to work with patients with orthopedic injuries,” said Heather Henderson, DPT, NCS, a physical therapy instructor in Rosalind Franklin University’s College of Health Professions.

“The Neuro Clinic was developed to expose students to patients with neurological disorders and broaden their appreciation for the multiple signs and symptoms that persons with neurological diagnoses may possess.”

So last year Henderson, along with other faculty, designed a program for second-year DPT students that allow them to work with patients with neurological diagnoses. In the inaugural year for the Neuro Clinic, Physical Therapy faculty reached out to the community, seeking people with neurological disorders who would benefit from physical therapy.

They quickly found the needed volunteers, many of them people like Konobeck, who felt he would benefit from more therapy.

Three-person teams of students were matched with each patient for a weekly one hour session over the eight week Neuro Clinic. Students worked on developing and implementing a personalized therapy program with exercises for their patient to work on at home.

The clinic is overseen by faculty who follow each therapy session with a group discussion. Most of the patients from last year’s session, including Konobeck, returned to the program this year.

Rosanne Thomas, PT, PhD, associate professor of physical therapy, said the program has been an enormous success for both the students and the patient volunteers.

“This helps the students look at the whole patient, and about how their condition is impacting their lives, rather than just looking at an ankle joint or a knee joint,” Dr. Thomas said. “The volunteers are benefiting greatly, but they are also really excited about working with the students and sharing their personal situations.”

DPT students Audie Veloria and Mary Eberhardt, who work together as part of a team in the Neuro Clinic program at Rosalind Franklin University, said the program has sparked their interest in treating patients with neurological conditions.

“I like the challenge of it,” Eberhardt said.

Konobeck has enjoyed the challenge as well, saying he feels that the therapy sessions have helped him get stronger, and made it physically easier for him to stay at the part-time job he enjoys.

“It really helps,” he said. “It’s helped at work, and it’s helped me with walking. I’m glad I came. And I plan on coming back next year too.”

About Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science

Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science is a national leader in interprofessional medical and healthcare education, comprising the Chicago Medical School, College of Health Professions, Dr. William M. Scholl College of Podiatric Medicine and School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

Rosalind Franklin University recently received approval for its new doctoral program in Interprofessional Healthcare Studies – the first in Illinois – and has launched a new master in science program in Psychology Clinical Counseling in fall 2008.

There are more than 16,000 RFUMS graduates in the United States and worldwide.