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### **Medical Rehabilitation Helps to Repair Lives**

During the month of September, the health community recognizes the contributions of medical rehabilitation to both disabled individuals and society in general. As the National Rehabilitation Awareness Foundation notes, "rehabilitation is a medical specialty which helps restore people affected by potentially disabling disease or traumatic injury to good health and functional, productive lives and also helps minimize physical or cognitive disabilities."

Rehabilitation is an interdisciplinary approach to care that is individualized to meet the specific needs of the injured or disabled person. Currently, there are approximately 50 million Americans with disabilities, and chances are good that nearly every American will need rehabilitation services at least once in their lives. Some medical and developmental problems that can be improved with rehabilitation include injuries from falls and accidents, back or neck pain, sports injuries, nerve damage, amputation, stroke, balance problems, swallowing problems, language impairment, urinary incontinence, muscle weakness, to name a few.

While many illnesses and injuries require acute medical care at first, once the person is medically stable and the risk of further complications has been resolved, the rehabilitation process begins. A rehabilitation team is formed, consisting of appropriate specialists that might include physiatrists, rehabilitation nurses, physical, occupational, respiratory, or recreational therapists, psychologists, speech pathologists, or vocational counselors. The team, with the patient, will develop a carefully planned program designed to help the disabled person regain as much function as possible. This process often requires relearning old skills as well as acquiring new ones. While the goal of rehabilitation is to restore previous abilities to the fullest possible extent, at times living with a disability requires learning to live with new limitations, or learning new methods to accomplish routine tasks.

When rehabilitation becomes necessary, there are a variety of programs from which to choose. If both medical care and rehabilitation services are required, an acute rehabilitation program in a hospital is needed; once the medical needs have been met, a subacute program may be put in place until the patient is released from the hospital. Upon discharge, a patient may be sent to a skilled nursing facility or a community-based day rehabilitation program. When a patient returns home from the hospital, home health care may be required before he or she is able to venture outside of the house. Once a certain level of ability is achieved, outpatient rehabilitation may become a viable option.

Not only is rehabilitation important to the quality of life of the individual who is or has become disabled, but society benefits as well. The National Rehabilitation Awareness Foundation reports that for every dollar spent on rehabilitation care, an estimated eleven dollars are saved in costs associated with long term disability. With proper rehabilitation, many people are able to return to work and remain productive and independent.

To learn more about the role of medical rehabilitation and the professions that deal with various aspects of the rehabilitation process, visit the National Rehabilitation Awareness Foundation's web site at [www.nrafnet.org](http://www.nrafnet.org) (1-800-943-6723), the National Rehabilitation Information Center at [www.naric.com](http://www.naric.com) (1-800-346-2743), or the National Rehabilitation Hospital at [www.nrhref.org](http://www.nrhref.org) (1-202-877-1000). For further information about this or any other public health concern, contact the Central Connecticut Health District at 860-721-2822 ([www.ccthd.org](http://www.ccthd.org).)