

# Road to stroke recovery goes through rehab

---

*Laureen Albrecht - Special to the Democrat - October 2, 2015*



*(Photo: Special to the Democrat)*

Every 40 seconds someone has a stroke. One out of six people will suffer a stroke in his lifetime. Strokes are the fifth leading cause of death in the United States.

Despite the gravity of the situation, the vast majority of Americans do not think of strokes as a major health concern. "Until it happens to you or a loved one, no one really knows how a stroke can rob quality of life," says Kim Nahoom, occupational therapist - OT/L, C/NDT, for Centre Pointe Health & Rehabilitation.

The good news is two-thirds of those who survive a stroke make gains with extensive rehabilitation. A good example of the restorative powers of therapy is Tallahassee resident Maurice Carter. Like many others affected with neurological injury, he lost his ability to walk and function.

Carter is one of nearly 800,000 Americans who annually suffer a stroke. Although the incidences of stroke have declined significantly since the 1960s, strokes that happen are just as severe. In fact, it's the leading cause of long-term disability in the United States.

Research does provide hope, however. The largest U.S. study of stroke rehabilitation to date, shows 52 percent of the participants significantly improved in walking, everyday function and quality of life, regardless of how severe their impairment.

Rehab experts, like Nahoom, report that therapy can provide a new lease on life.

"Initially, Maurice needed one to two people to help him transfer and walk. For daily familiar tasks, like dressing and eating, he needed to re-learn how to use his right arm," Nahoom says.

After months of therapy, Carter now walks without assistance and dresses on his own. He follows Nahoom's instructions and uses his stroke-impaired limb for daily activities. She gives him progressively more demanding tasks as he continues to strengthen and progress.

He's now working on some of the most challenging aspects of therapy related to falls.

“Imagine not having good use of one half of your body. Now imagine falling and trying to get off the floor,” says Nahoom. Carter works to get off the floor and onto his feet. “At first, he was overwhelmed. But after a few practice drills, he was able to get into a seated position and then stand.”

She is also teaching him strategies to integrate him back into the community, which involves going to restaurants, walking across streets and following safety precautions. In the grocery store, he’s relearning how to visually scan shelves and using his affected arm to retrieve correct items.

Nahoom says that stroke patients have to learn how to plan a task. Carter must problem solve and then execute his decisions using proper sequence of thoughts and actions in an effective manner.

After a stroke, going out into the community is new and complex. “Just walking with a cane or walker around obstacles is challenging, but it’s a good opportunity to problem solve and practice the right steps,” says Nahoom.

Inpatient therapy aims to recognize and address any weakness or deficits prior to discharge home. Right now, Carter is relearning money management and how to communicate with various vendors. At the cash register, he has to determine if he has enough money to pay for items and then complete the counting and exchange of money.

“He’s always learning and he’s always asking for more challenges,” says Nahoom. “A successful patient looks at rehab the same way they look at a job. Maurice always looks for tough tasks, and wants to master new activities, like cooking or shopping for groceries.”

These newfound skills drive him along his road to recovery and bode well for his next transition into the community.

Carter is an example that the effects of stroke are challenging. But research indicates the quicker you receive evaluation and treatment, the better your chances are for recovering without a significant loss of function.

*For more information regarding stroke rehabilitation, call Centre Pointe Health & Rehabilitation at 850-386-4054. They offer comprehensive rehabilitative outpatient and inpatient services for short or long term care and are located at 2255 Centerville Rd., Tallahassee.*