



Valdosta Daily Times Article

Talking to several patients at Innovative Rehab Solutions in Valdosta is a humbling experience. Speaking with individuals who are working hard to overcome physical and medical issues could easily be overwhelming, but when they have tremendous spirits and positive attitudes, it's also uplifting and inspiring. Bikram Mohanty, occupational therapist walks us through some of the therapies offered but otherwise, stayed in the background and let their patients tell the story.



Real Stories

Real people telling their heart-warming stories

Recovering from Paralysis



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For Laurie Miller, Innovative Rehab is a lifeline back to a normal life. On Nov. 30, 2010, Miller developed symptoms of severe Transverse Myelitis. In four hours, she was paralyzed from the middle of her back down. In Tifton at the time, she sought medical treatment immediately and was diagnosed quickly, with steroid therapy helping her regain movement. Transverse Myelitis is an inflammation around the spinal cord which damages nerve fibers. Causes range from viral infections to complications of a disease or even a vaccination, but in a number of cases, there is no known cause. These causes are called idiopathic, which is what Miller is experiencing.

"One third of patients have no recovery at all, one third have a partial recovery, and one third have a complete recovery," Miller said, who is still undergoing treatment three years later. After undergoing treatment at several facilities, she moved to Valdosta and found Mohanty. She immediately felt at home, and began therapy which included using the underwater treadmill. "It works just like a treadmill but you have the pull of the water, so it's much gentler but more effective. You can set the speed, time and resistance, and I work out with weights in the water. too," she said.

Miller also under goes CTS, or craniosacral therapy, with Mohanty. "It's a type of massage, except Mohanty barely touches me. The touch is so gentle you can hardly feel it. It helps to balance your systems by gently manipulating the body's pulse points, and it makes me feel totally relaxed," she said. Mohanty said that CST not only can help heal the body, it can also help to build immunity and be used as a preventive tool. "For example, if a patient has had a mini-stroke, the therapy can help prevent the chances of having another stroke," he said.

Although Miller has made significant strides in her recovery process, she has a long road ahead. She has loss of feeling in her legs. She can walk, but recently walked into an ant bed and had no idea that she'd been bitten until hours later, and by then, the bites were becoming infected. She has problems with balance, but after working with Innovative Rehab, she says she falls less than she used to and can catch herself now. The main issue for Miller in recovery was getting to scuba dive again.

"I went to Key West and I dove!" she said. "I dive shipwrecks and it was wonderful to get back to it."



Consulting

A Child's Battle

Halia Strickland is a vivacious 10-year old who's not afraid to tell you her opinion, especially when it comes to medicine.

"Awful!" she says, when discussing the chemotherapy or the many pills she's had to take in the last five years. Elena Strickland, Halia's mother, said up until four years ago, she was a very healthy child. However, in August of 2009, when Halia was 6, her fingertips turned blue, a condition called Raynauds' Syndrome.

"We took her to her pediatrician, and he didn't know what was causing it. He started her on steroids but a couple of months later, her fingertips became necrotic and they fell off," said Elena. After taking Halia to numerous physicians and spending several weeks at the Medical College of Georgia facility in Augusta, she was ultimately diagnosed with Schleroderma, a chronic disease; its most visible symptom is hardening of the skin.

"The disease is progressive, and as her skin hardened, it was drawing up her arms and legs. She has to have therapy so she can move and stretch," Elena said. "If she didn't have therapy, she'd get much worse and her skin would get tighter." The aquatic therapy in the pool is Halia's favorite part as she said it feels good and relaxes her and she loves the staff at Innovative Rehab. Halia's father, Michael said she has been to several therapists, but Mohanty has been the best for her and the family owes him a great deal.

"The water therapy really helps her, and even when Medicaid said they were going to reduce the number of visits she was allowed, he kept treating her because he really cares about her well-being," Michael said.

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Elena said other therapists were much rougher on Halia but Mohanty is very gentle. "She's never been uncomfortable coming here, even when she's hurting." Elena said. "He does what she needs and will benefit her, not just what Medicaid will pay for." Scleroderma is a lifelong condition but she could stabilize, get worse or get better. According to her mother, Halia has a 5 percent chance that it could go away completely. Micheal and Elena are homeschooling Halia and her sister, Katie, 11. Both are at the sixth-grade level as Halia has skipped the 5th grade. Both parents work and share homeschooling duties, with Michael smiling and referring to Elana as the "principal."

She has been so inspired by Bikram Mohanty and the work he's done with Halia that Elena has decided to continue her education and become an occupational therapist, too. He recommended her to a program in Atlanta where she will attend her master's level classes every other weekend so she can be home with her family.

One of the most challenging aspects of the disease is that Halia has a difficult time gaining weight. "She's gotten taller but she weighs less than she did several years ago. She can eat anything and we encourage her to eat whatever she wants." Halia's preference? "Anything with sugar in it!" and her favorite food? "Cookie dough or cookies and cream ice cream."



LIFE CAN CHANGE SO QUICKLY

One moment Matt Dupree of Homerville was a healthy, strapping 20-year-old man. The next moment, his life was forever changed when his ATV hit a culvert on a highway in Homerville. Matt was life-flighted to Shands in Gainesville, FL, where physicians are trained to work with severe brain injuries. "He didn't have hardly a scratch on him. No broken bones. But the doctors said his brain damage was so severe, he would always be a vegetable," said his father Don. As Matt was receiving therapy on a table from Bikram Mohanty, he listened attentively as his father described his life since May 5, 2007.

"Matt spent 100 days in Shands, and they tried to get us to unplug him twice, but we wouldn't give up." When he asked what would have happened to Matt if they had, Don says, "He would have been sent to a nursing home to die." After fighting to get him accepted into Shepard Center in Atlanta, which specializes in traumatic brain injuries, Matt spent six months there undergoing therapy. Shepard follows up with the family, and they still visit the center monthly. Following his time there, Don says he and his wife, Cindy, carried Matt everywhere they could get him help.

"When it's your child, you do what you need to and you keep looking until you find what works."

Matt was football player for Clinch County on the state championship team, coached by his uncle, Jim Dickerson. For a gifted athlete to not be able to walk, talk or control his movements, life for the Duprees was not easy but they weren't deterred. They kept taking him to different treatments, from acupuncture to horse therapy, and his condition slowly improved, ultimately found Innovative Rehab.

"Now, he can walk 1,000 steps a day and he swims in the pool. They said he would never talk again and you can see that's not the case at all," said Don, as Matt started chatting with the reporter and the staff. "He's come a long way working with Bikram, and he has a great attitude. I know he will continue to improve," said Don.

Even though initially, physicians didn't give the family much hope, after some time at Shands, Don received a call one day from Cindy on his cell phone while he was standing beside Matt's bed. "He reached for the phone. I couldn't believe it. I told his mom to hang on and to talk to him."

Don said Matt brought the phone up to his ear and talked to her, saying just a few words, but that was more than enough. "The nurse didn't believe me that he could talk, because when they came in the room and spoke to him, he wouldn't answer them. I told one nurse to go out and call him on the phone, and she did. He answered and told her he was fine. She peeked around the corner because she thought it was me playing a joke on her, and couldn't believe it was him."