

VNA'S TOTAL JOINT REPLACEMENT REHAB PROGRAM

In the past 20 years, total joint replacements (TJR) have become a very common and successful surgery for Americans. With the aging of our population and to meet the health conscious, "baby boomer" demands, it is anticipated that there will be more than 4 million TJR surgeries done by the year 2030.

Rehabilitation after a TJR is a team approach, using the expertise of the surgeon, rehabilitation nurse, physical therapist and occupational therapist. Increasingly, many people return directly to their own home after surgery and studies show that recovery time is often shorter and with better outcomes. Being aware of the tools that can help patients to participate actively in their recovery can be very beneficial and reassuring.

Before surgery, it is a good idea for the patient or a family member to complete a home environmental safety assessment to make home adaptations or obtain equipment if needed.

Things to assess include:

- How many stairs are there? Is there a railing? Should one be installed for safety?
- Are the floors even or are there thresholds to navigate?
- Are there scatter rugs that need to be removed?
- Is the bedroom on the first floor?
- Is the bed height adequate? Too low or too high is generally not safe. The bed can not be too low especially with THR.
- Is the bathroom accessible with a walking device?
- Will an elevated commode, grab bar or rails be needed?
- Will a tub seat or bench fit if needed?
- Look at the seating in the home. The use of an armed dining chair of adequate height is safest. Rocking or swiveling chairs are dangerous, difficult and unsafe to get up from.



Elaine Rideout of South Hadley observes as Holyoke VNA Physical Therapist Allison Wells measures the range of motion in her knee.

Bringing this home information to the hospital physical and occupational therapists will help them provide specific training for a safe discharge home.

Due to advancements in TJR surgical procedures, anesthesia and pain control, the hospital length of stay has been reduced to 3-4 days. It is important that pain is managed well, and the physician and hospital staff will see to this. Another thing to expect is early mobility-getting out of bed soon after surgery, taking a walk and starting therapeutic exercise. To be discharged home, one must be able to transfer from bed, chair and toilet and walk safely with a device, for short distances.

"You need a lot of support after surgery. It makes all the difference. My family, friends and therapists have helped me with so much. I could not do this without them."

Elaine Rideout

Once home, the assistance of family and friends is extremely important. Elaine Rideout, who is recovering from recent TJR surgery with the help of the rehabilitation therapists of the Holyoke Visiting Nurse Association strongly agrees. She said, "You need a lot of support after surgery. It makes all the difference. My family, friends and therapists have helped me with so much. I could not do this without them."

Home health services include skilled nursing, physical therapy and occupational therapy treatment. The rehabilitation nurse evaluates and provides treatment and teaching for ongoing medical needs.

Occupational therapy focuses on training for self care and home management activities, such as learning

how to dress independently again, all household transfer training (especially for shower and toilet transfers), and light meal preparation. The OT progresses activities as the patient's mobility, strength and function improve.

The physical therapist completes a comprehensive examination and establishes the treatment plan.

Therapeutic exercise focuses on improving joint range of motion, muscle strength and endurance for activity. A daily home exercise program will be done to maximize progress, prevent complications and loss of ground between PT sessions. Gait training using a device is continued, progressing to all surfaces and stairs. If there is any unsteadiness the PT will train a caregiver on guarding for all ambulation, to prevent a fall.

The patient is referred to outpatient physical therapy, once able to re-access the community safely. A successful recovery from TJR, allows people to return to the activities that they enjoy!

The Holyoke VNA and Hospice Life Care, a trusted leader in home health care and hospice, serving Holyoke and the 19 surrounding communities since 1905, provides the full continuum of professional services for those who would like to receive care for an illness or injury in the comfort of home. They have a formalized TJR rehabilitation program. For assistance or questions, please call 534-5691 or visit www.holyokevna.org to view a 10 minute TJR video. □