

Gert Haidle, left, smiles as she takes Norma Lovely's blood pressure while she works out on the NuStep machine. The NuStep is generally the first machine a patient will work out on, as it exercises the arms and the legs and the cl easily accessible for the staff to take blood pressure readings.

# Cardiac Rehab helps change lifestyle

When Gert Haidle had a heart attack seven years ago, her doctor referred her to Livingston Memorial Hospital's Cardiac Rehab program. She is still there, albeit as a volunteer, not a patient.

Haidle's experience with rehabilitation helps her to relate to the patients she sees every day as a Cardiac Rehab volunteer and exercise assistant.

"Well, I've been there and I know," Haidle said.

Haidle and the staff of Cardiac Rehab work to create a comfortable environment that is both healing and educational.

"An important part of our program is education," said Christine Usher, RN, Cardiac Rehabilitation manager. Usher and her team attempt to enlighten patients on many health-related issues corresponding with stress to the heart.

"We try to get people to look at their lifestyles and see where they need to change," Usher said, adding that most people are willing to make those changes. The most important lifestyle changes deal with diet and tobacco use, she said.

To facilitate education, a book and video library are available to those in the cardiac rehab program. Bulletin boards and posters around the exercise area offer healthy heart tips, and a monthly quiz is given.

During an hour-long workout, a staff member asks the patient whether or not they've taken their medication and how hard they're working according to a "Borg Scale," which rates perceived exertion.

Heart rates are monitored and blood pressure is taken while patients exercise on a variety of machines much like those in any fitness center.

But, it's not all work. With smiles and jokes passing between the staff and patients, the environment seems more like a gym than a rehabilitation center, which is beneficial to healthy recovery.

According to Usher, depression occurs in Cardiac Rehab patients three times as much as the average population.

"Three times as many (rehab patients) as the normal population have depression," Usher said.

She attributes this not only to the pain and physical stress of having surgery, but also to physical limitations and introductions of medications, dietary restrictions and not knowing what to do next.

"When people have heart surgery, people have to suddenly find out where to go," Usher said.

Their doctor will put them in contact with Usher, who meets with the patient to discuss their rehabilitation plan. Usher said that although the changes a person experiences after heart surgery can be difficult to cope with, the staff at Cardiac Rehab strives to "help people to see that they can get through it."

As someone who has experienced it, "it's overwhelming at first," Haidle admitted.

Haidle is living proof to the patients she sees that their obstacles can be overcome and they, too, can live a healthy life once again.



Gert Haidle encourages Norma Lovely during the cool-down stretches after Lovely's workout. Patients do warm-ups before their workout to speed up their heart rate and cool-downs afterward to slow it.



Story and photos by  
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Bill Jones is framed by exercise equipment as he spends time on the bicycle machine.