

Speech therapy helps woman communicate after stroke

In less than one year, Leona (Bobbi) Goetz Nelson has regained the ability to speak, walk, and successfully carry out day-to-day tasks. Bobbi lost these abilities after a debilitating stroke last July, and credits Perham Health's Speech Therapy Department with bringing her back to health.

"I had a stroke on July 25 last year," Bobbi explains. "I was taken by ambulance to Perham Health." From there, Bobbi was airlifted by helicopter to Sanford Health in Fargo where she underwent surgery to remove a clot from her brain.

Bobbi was moved to Sanford Rehab in Fargo until the end of August, when she was transferred to Perham Health's Transitions short-stay rehabilitation program. Transitions – located on the Perham Living campus - offers personalized care for people recovering from illness, injuries, or surgeries. It was during her time at Transitions that Bobbi began speech therapy.

"I couldn't speak at all right away," Bobbi recalls. She started meeting with Laura Nyhus, Perham Health's Speech Language Pathologist, five days a week.

"I loved her," Bobbi says of Nyhus, adding how much she appreciated the exercises Nyhus gave her to work on when she went back to her room at Transitions.

"The placement of Bobbi's stroke really affected her speech," explains Nyhus. "Often times, there is a disconnect between the brain 'telling' the muscles of the mouth what to do. Creating a pathway for this information to get from the brain to the correct place was the goal of many of the activities Bobbi did through speech therapy."

One activity at the onset of therapy was having Bobbi repeat words. She started with one or two syllable words and gradually increased the difficulty. Another exercise involved showing single objects (e.g.

hammer, book, pencil) and asking Bobbi to name them. This then progressed to naming the same items in pictures. These activities work to retrain the brain to generate the correct word.

"The ultimate goal was to help Bobbi become as independent as she could in the safest way possible. Being able to problem solve, sequence through actions and thoughts, and communicate are all very important to independence and safety," says Nyhus.

Even though Bobbi says her progress has

been slower than she wishes at times, she has made a remarkable recovery so far. "There are still some times when I have trouble expressing myself," she acknowledges. However, Bobbi is thankful to be able to communicate on her own without the assistance of a communication device, which is sometimes necessary after a severe stroke.

As a result of the stroke, Bobbi suffered from aphasia. Aphasia is a disorder that results from damage to the parts of the brain that contain language. The disorder, which can range from very mild to very severe, causes



One of the abilities Leona (Bobbi) Goetz Nelson lost after her stroke was the pleasure of reading a book. Less than a year after her stroke, she is thankful to once again be able to read. Bobbi credits Perham Health's speech therapy program for regaining the ability to read.

problems with any or all of the following: speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Speech-language pathologists can help patients with aphasia by working on drills and exercises to improve specific skills affected by damage to the brain. Patients are taught strategies to strengthen language skills. Similar skills assist patients diagnosed with Parkinson's disease.

Nyhus explains, "For example, some people may prefer to use gestures or writing rather than speaking. Some will use a combination of methods to communicate. We also practice telephone skills, take outings, read maps, and do money management tasks all in an effort to integrate functional, life skills into a person's rehabilitation program."

Bobbi's daughter, Cindy Vierkant, mentions how recalling the names of her grandkids was difficult for her mother after she had the stroke. Cindy wrote down the names of family members and then a speech therapist worked with Bobbi on relearning the names.

Family members are welcome and encouraged to attend speech therapy appointments at Perham Health. Nyhus says she frequently talks on the phone with family members and leaves instructions so loved ones know how to continue working on specific activities introduced through speech therapy. A detailed home exercise program is also developed for patients to provide additional guidance.

"My mom really has made amazing progress for the severity of the stroke she had," says Cindy. "Right away, my mom was paralyzed on the right side, couldn't talk, or even drink water. Now she's receiving messages on her iPad and answering her phone. She's done amazingly well."

In addition to the improvement in Bobbi's communication skills, she's also regained substantial physical strength. While receiving intensive speech therapy, Bobbi also had frequent physical and occupational therapy appointments through Perham Health. As a result of these therapies, Bobbi is once again able to walk without a walker and even shower on her own. Having this physical mobility is especially important to Bobbi, who was extremely active prior to her stroke.

Bobbi, who lived on Otter Tail Lake before her stroke, was a frequent volunteer and would exercise regularly. She enjoyed swimming at Thumper Pond twice a week, water walking with her neighbors, and exercising at the Ottertail Community Center on a weekly basis. She would also volunteer in the Perham Living gift shop two times a month.

"I think that because she was in such good physical shape before her stroke that helped her come back a lot better physically," Cindy mentions.

Speech therapy frequently works closely with physical therapy and occupational therapy, coordinating nursing staff, social work, physicians, and dietary needs to make sure patients receive the best rehabilitation care.

"Communication and collaboration between departments is key to maximizing the potential of individual patients," mentions Nyhus.

"Coordinating with the physicians is also very important. As therapists, we work with patients several hours a day and really get to know their specific strengths and weaknesses. Being able to relay these details to the



Laura Nyhus, Perham Health's Speech Language Pathologist, works with Leona (Bobbi) Goetz Nelson to help her regain her communication abilities. Bobbi's speech therapy appointments often utilized modern technology to improve cognitive and word-finding tasks.

physicians is important in making sure the patient gets well-rounded, well-informed, and collaborated care."

"We feel very blessed to have my mom progress as much as she has. We would highly recommend the therapists at Perham Health," Cindy notes.

Nyhus is quick to mention what a delight Bobbi was to work with, "What makes her so special is her motivation and drive to be as successful as she can be. Even with the communication barriers Bobbi had at the onset of her stay in Transitions, she was able to make friends and gain the trust of other residents in the transitional care unit. It was an honor to be a part of Bobbi's rehabilitation and to see her succeed with all the hard work she put in."

After a little more than a month in Transitions, Bobbi was moved to The Madison assisted living facility in Detroit Lakes. For a few weeks after moving to The Madison, the therapists from Perham Living Home Care continued working with Bobbi. Cindy says it was extremely beneficial for her mom to be able to work with the same therapists she had developed a relationship with during her stay at Transitions.

Bobbi, who continues to reside at the assisted living facility, is now finished with speech therapy. "I am so glad I had speech therapy," she concludes. "I really don't know what I would have done without it." As her communication and physical abilities continue to improve, Bobbi now has a new goal in mind. Her plan? To return to her own home some time this summer.



Leona (Bobbi) Goetz Nelson appreciates the independence speech therapy helped her achieve after she suffered a debilitating stroke last July. She is now able to communicate and complete household tasks thanks to intensive therapy appointments through Perham Health.

Patients offered option of *advanced practice providers*

In order to assist doctors with managing their patient loads and provide additional healthcare options for patients, there are several advanced practice providers (APP's) on staff at Perham Health. APP's serve primary care patients by doing physicals, occupational medicine, same day appointments, chronic disease management, and more.

"While we want patients to develop a relationship with their primary provider, we recognize it can be difficult to get in to see that provider," says Perham Health Clinic Director Beth Ulschmid. "With an electronic medical record, we can offer good continuity of care and patients can feel confident the next provider they see will know their story—whether it's another physician or an advanced practice provider."

APP's provide high-quality primary and specialty healthcare services similar to

those of a physician. They can prescribe medications; order, perform, and interpret diagnostic tests such as lab work and x-rays; diagnose and treat acute and chronic conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, infections, and injuries; and manage a patient's care.

At Perham Health, patients have the option to choose a physician's assistant or family nurse practitioner as their primary healthcare provider. These APP's all have advanced clinical training. In order to qualify as an APP, a healthcare provider must have a four-year degree and attend a master's program that takes an additional two years to complete, including coursework and clinical rotations.

"We just can't hire enough medical doctors to meet the growing needs of the community," Ulschmid says. "By including APP's on our healthcare team, the benefit

for patients is better access to high-quality healthcare."

APP's often focus on health promotion, disease prevention, and health education and counseling. One of their primary goals is to guide patients to make smarter health and lifestyle choices.

Perham Health's APP's have direct access to all of the clinic's physicians. If an APP has a question, he or she can easily and quickly confer with a medical doctor on staff.

According to Ulschmid, patients have responded extremely favorably to Perham Health's team of APP's. "Judy Bellanger-Dahl, a physician's assistant who works with our surgeon Dr. Stolee, has worked here since 2003 and has a great reputation. She has been an excellent mentor to our newer APP's and has paved the way for them to be welcomed by the community," Ulschmid says.

Perham Health's advanced practice providers



**Judy Bellanger-Dahl,
PA**

As a certified physician's assistant specializing in surgery, Judy Bellanger-Dahl works primarily with Dr. Rand Stolee in treating surgical patients. She also does some primary care at the Perham Health Clinic, diagnosing and treating adults and children with a wide range of medical problems.



**Marisa Zutter,
FNP**

Marisa Zutter is a family nurse practitioner who works in the Perham Health Ottertail Clinic two and a half days a week and in the Perham clinic two to three days a week doing primary and same day care.



**Julie Tobkin,
FNP**

Julie Tobkin is a family nurse practitioner who works in the Perham Health New York Mills Clinic doing primary care and occasionally in the Perham clinic doing same day care.



**Kevin Swenson,
PA**

Kevin Swenson was recently hired to start as a physician's assistant at the end of July 2014. He will work primarily in the Perham Health emergency department and the same day appointment clinic.



**Mindy Anderson,
FNP**

Starting September 8, 2014, Mindy Anderson, family nurse practitioner, will join Perham Health's qualified team of healthcare providers.



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Mature Mile & Family 5K Fun Run/Walk

Saturday, June 7, 2014

Perham Living's Mature Mile and Family 5K Fun Run/Walk is a community event to promote wellness. The event is geared to be inclusive for all ages - one to 100 - and to encourage health and wellness at all stages and ages in life.



Mature Mile

The Mature Mile is an untimed event for those 60 years and older. All are welcome to participate regardless of fitness level, including people with assistive devices such as walkers and wheelchairs. The race route loops around the Perham Living campus and several additional community blocks.

Family 5K Fun Run/Walk

This is great for friends and family members of all ages and fitness levels. This is a timed event. The Family 5K incorporates the community's new Wellness Trail and Wildflower Trail. The race begins and ends at the Perham Living campus.

Schedule of Events

9 a.m.	Registration
10 a.m.	Family 5K Fun Run/Walk
11 a.m.	Mature Mile

Registration

Pre-Registration by May 25\$12
Registration day of event\$15

To download the registration form or to register online, please visit perhamhealth.org