Respiratory therapy helps patients breathe easier

“I remember when just walking from my house to the car would make me exhausted,” Sheila Widness recalls. “But now, since starting respiratory therapy, I don’t get tired nearly so fast. I’m not saying I’d run a marathon or anything, but I do have two grandkids in track and cross country and I am able to go to their meets.”

Every Tuesday and Thursday Widness makes the trip from her home in Richville to Perham Health where she participates in an hour-long pulmonary rehabilitation exercise session with registered respiratory therapist Lindsay Branby. Widness, who is diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), started receiving respiratory therapy services this March after having a graft put in surgically for dialysis.

“Right after surgery, my oxygen fell quite a bit. I ended up needing to use oxygen all of the time,” she explains. “I also kept getting pneumonia.”

Widness says she has already made more progress than she thought she would with the program. She credits the consistent rehab schedule and the education and support provided by Branby. “She taught me to concentrate on the way I am breathing,” Widness says. “I need to breathe in through my nose and out through my mouth. Focusing on that has really helped me.”

“I have gradually been able to stop using the oxygen,” Widness continues. “Now I only occasionally use it at night. I don’t get tired out so fast either. Doing housework, going up and down the steps… I can do all of those things now because of what I do in therapy.”

Within just 30 days of the start of her pulmonary rehab program, Widness was able to exercise without needing additional oxygen to breathe. Her initial exercise time was just 16 minutes, on two liters of oxygen. She is now able to exercise for a full hour.

“Breathing is something we often take for granted until it is compromised,” Branby acknowledges. “Through diagnostic testing, medications, and conditioning this can often be improved or maintained.”

At a typical pulmonary rehab session, Branby assists patients on various exercise machines, encouraging them to improve their strength and endurance from session to session. Patients begin at their own comfort level. Branby then works with them to gradually increase the duration and difficulty of their exercising. Patient vitals and oxygenation are monitored throughout exercise.

“Along with physical progress, I also make sure to address educational topics related to pulmonary disease,” Branby continues. She provides patients with information about medications, lung conditions, oxygen use, nutrition, and more. As a tobacco treatment specialist, she is also certified in tobacco cessation counseling.

Joining Branby and Widness at the twice-weekly pulmonary rehab appointments is Joan Ahlfs. She was referred to the program by Dr. Susan Farkas, a cardiologist with Sanford Health. “I have congestive heart failure and I also have myasthenia gravis,” Ahlfs explains. “After I was diagnosed with congestive heart failure, my doctor said I should start pulmonary rehab and this would help.”

Ahlfs, who started therapy right around the same time as Widness, says she’s already noticed she is able to exercise for much longer than when she first started out. In the beginning, she was exercising for a total of five minutes, on three liters of oxygen. She is now up to 41 minutes of exercise time per session.

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Perham Health’s Registered Respiratory Therapist Lindsay Branby (middle) sits down with Sheila Widness (left) and Joan Ahlfs (right) to answer questions and talk about respiratory conditions.
"My breathing and circulation have both improved. I can tell this is also helping me maintain, and even improve, my muscle strength," she says. "I can definitely walk better now."

For both Ahlfs and Widness, one of the unexpected perks of the pulmonary rehab program is the friendship they’ve built over the course of the last few months. "When I first started, I didn’t think it was going to make me feel better," Ahlfs admits. "But right now, I’m at a place where I enjoy doing it. I’ve been able to exercise longer each time and just enjoy visiting and being here."

"I like the visiting," Widness agrees, joking, "It’s like our night on the town."

Ahlfs also mentions how Branby makes the sessions a positive experience. "She’s been wonderful," she says. "She really challenges me. She taught me some arm exercises I can do with weights when I am at home. When I am here she encourages me to do my best, which was especially helpful for me when I was just beginning."

To keep providers informed about the progress patients are making at rehab, Branby sends a progress note to each patient’s primary care provider every 30 days or sooner if questions arise. In Ahlf’s case, her primary care physician, Dr. Thomas Seaworth, reviews the updates from Branby and watches Ahlf’s bloodwork closely to make sure she isn't losing too much potassium.

Respiratory therapy services are provided to patients with disorders of pulmonary and cardiac systems. Services include diagnostic testing, therapeutic care, emergency airway management, and patient education. "Pulmonary rehab is just one portion of respiratory therapy," Branby notes. "We work with patients from birth to the end of life. For example, some infants will require support after delivery if any respiratory distress is noted."

A few of the most common conditions treated through respiratory therapy services include: asthma, COPD, interstitial lung disease, emphysema, bronchitis, pneumonias, RSV, congestive heart failure, or any other condition that may contribute to respiratory distress. Services are provided to Perham Health patients in both inpatient and outpatient settings.

"It really is wonderful to have pulmonary rehab available right here in Perham," Ahlfs mentions. "I live by Ottertail and I wouldn’t want to travel any further."

Pulmonary rehabilitation program goals include helping patients to improve their strength, become more independent, complete daily activities with less shortness of breath, and do more of the things they enjoy. Branby works with patients on setting realistic goals and then supports them in achieving those goals. She is also available to answer questions and help patients manage their symptoms and medicines.

"Lung health is very important. It is never too late to work toward improving it," Branby says. "As a new service line, I look forward to growing our programs to provide better care to patients suffering from respiratory ailments."

“You feel like you are doing such simple little things, for such a small amount of time, but it has made a huge difference in my life,” Widness concludes.

Lindsay Branby, registered respiratory therapist at Perham Health, checks the vitals and oxygenation of Sheila Widness. Widness, who is diagnosed with COPD, says the respiratory therapy services she is receiving through Perham Health have given her back the energy she needs to enjoy life.
Our commitment to antibiotic stewardship

Antibiotics can be both helpful and harmful. Here at Perham Health, we are committed to prescribing antibiotics only when necessary.

“Perham Health has had an antibiotic stewardship program for a very long time,” explains Cheryl Krause, infection control coordinator at Perham Health. “However, in light of all the new resistant bacteria (bacteria that only has one or two antibiotics that will kill it), we have increased our surveillance efforts. We want to do our part to minimize the risks of antibiotic resistance in our community.”

Along with serious side effects, unnecessary antibiotics lead to antibiotic resistance. Antibiotic resistance is when bacteria develop ways to withstand antibiotics. These resistant bacteria can spread to you and your loved ones. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that two million people get resistant infections yearly in the U.S. and 23,000 die as a result.

As part of a local collaborative for antibiotic stewardship, Perham Health is promoting education about when antibiotics should be used. Antibiotics only fight infections caused by bacteria. Taking antibiotics when you have a virus can do more harm than good because it gives bacteria a chance to become more resistant.

“It can sometimes be hard to know when you need an antibiotic and when you do not. Reminding your provider that you only want an antibiotic if it is truly needed is a great way to help your provider help you,” advises Krause.

Another component of antibiotic stewardship is making sure patients get the right antibiotic, at the right time, for the right length of time. Krause explains, “Our antibiotic stewardship program involves the skill and knowledge of our providers, pharmacy, and infection control to review antibiotic orders with the culture results to ensure that the most appropriate treatment is given.”

Taking these actions is essential to providing patients with the best care. Perham Health is dedicated to prescribing antibiotics only when they are needed, and not prescribing them when they might do more harm than good.

What can you do?
Ask three questions before you take antibiotics:
1) Do I really need antibiotics?
Antibiotics treat bacterial infections. Ask whether you have a bacterial infection.
2) What are the risks?
Antibiotics can cause side effects like nausea and diarrhea and lead to antibiotic resistance.
3) Are there other options to help me feel better?
Rest and plenty of fluids are important. Ask about over-the-counter medicines that might help relieve your symptoms.

The Connection: Your local resource for senior services

Who should you contact if a family member needs home delivered meals or help cleaning the house? Where can you go to learn more about home care or assisted living services available in our community?

Thanks to efforts by Perham Health and other community partners, there is now a one-stop, local resource set up to answer these types of questions. The Connection is a new referral center for all senior services offered in Perham and the surrounding area. Seniors or their family members can call, send a message via The Connection’s website, or schedule a face-to-face visit with a local resource navigator who will help them find the services they need.

“I think it is really important that we are a local resource people can trust. We are located in the community and are available to meet in person if people would like to,” explains Jill Harder, community resource navigator for The Connection. “The most rewarding part of my job is being able to assist individuals and families with accessing the services they need to remain in their homes.”

When people get in touch through The Connection, Harder is committed to making sure they get connected with the proper agencies that offer the services they need. Services may range from home care, lawn mowing, snow removal, transportation, and assisted living services, to exploring funding options to pay for these and other services.

“After I have conversations with people, I also make sure to follow up with a call within three to five days to check to make sure they were able to reach the services they needed,” Harder continues.

Launched this July, The Connection is already actively serving people in Perham and the surrounding area. “The response has been great,” reports Maggie Fresonke, project manager with The Connection. “As word of The Connection gets out in the community, we see a direct correlation in the number of phone calls we are getting.”

When the idea of The Connection was first being discussed, Fresonke says people throughout the community immediately recognized the need for this type of resource. They would often remark how they wished it had been available when they had questions about senior services. “Furthermore, I have recently worked with my family on figuring out services for my grandparents,” she adds. “Even with knowing the system, I still found myself questioning where to start. By having this service available in the community, it will offer seniors, their families, and healthcare providers a sense of comfort by having someone local they can turn to for answers to their questions.”

For assistance navigating the world of aging services, contact The Connection at (218) 347-LINK (5465) or visit www.the-connection.info to request assistance or schedule an appointment with the community resource navigator.
Just for **WOMEN**

**5:00 – 6:45 p.m.**
- 40+ education booths
- Health screenings
- On-site water testing – *bring home sample*
- Flu shots
- Massage
- Refreshments

**7:00 p.m.**
**Guest Speaker – Lucie Amundsen**

Author of the award-winning non-fiction book, *Locally Laid*, about the family’s pratfall into farming and the stressed economics of Middle Agriculture, Lucie and her husband co-own Locally Laid Egg Company, a farm that provides pasture-raised eggs in Northern Minnesota.

Tuesday, October 16
Perham High School | 800 Coney Street W