

Finding health and hope at transitions

What started out as a fun family vacation in Florida suddenly took a dramatic turn for the worse for Sandy Gillespie.

"It was September of 2016. The kids all went to Disney and I decided to stay back and rest," 75-year-old Gillespie recalls.

As Gillespie's family noticed her rapidly declining condition, she was transported to the hospital for evaluation. "I remember going through the double doors, and that was the last thing I remember until the day before Thanksgiving."

Gillespie ended up spending the next three months in a Florida hospital.

What started out as a bladder infection turned into septic shock, and nearly took her life. Her heart, liver, and kidneys all started shutting down. She was given a drug that saved her life, but caused terrible side effects – including losing all of her toes and portions of her fingers.

While hospitalized in Florida, Gillespie reported a poor quality of care. She felt discouraged about her situation and not very hopeful about ever being able to actively enjoy life as she was accustomed to doing back home. "From the day I arrived in the hospital in Florida until the day I left, I was never in a bathroom," she laments. "I didn't know if I'd ever get home or if I'd even make it."

With help from her daughter-in-law, Gillespie was finally able to return to Perham at the end of December 2016. She immediately came to Transitions, Perham Living's short-term rehabilitation unit. "From the moment I arrived at Transitions, I felt like everyone there believed I could improve. For the first time, I felt like I was going to make it. I was going to live," she says.

The very first day she arrived at Transitions, Gillespie was thrilled when staff assisted her in using the bathroom for the first time in months.

The second day she was in Transitions, she remembers how staff washed her hair. This is a significant memory for her because she says her hair hadn't been

touched in months. "I felt like I was instantly surrounded with so much love and so much care," she recalls.

A key person in Gillespie's incredible rehabilitation story is Perham Health physical therapist, Matt Johnson. She explains, "Matt came in the day I arrived at Transitions. He told me he would be my therapist, and wanted to know what all had happened so far. Then I remember that he said to me, 'You're here with us now, would you like to sit up?'"

"I said, 'I can't sit up. I don't know how.'"

"He said, 'Let's try.'"

"Matt sat me up on the bed and held me. Then he asked me to get up. He stood me up and he held me. Just for a second. Then he helped me sit back on the bed and asked how I was doing."

"After this, I remember Matt asking me, 'What do you want while you're here with us?'"

"I said, 'I want to walk to the potty.'"

"He said, 'How bad do you want it? Are you willing to work?'"

"I said, 'I don't know if I can do it, but I'm willing to try!'"

Gillespie says Johnson made a commitment to work just as hard as she was, right along with her. Initial exercises focused on strengthening her core, to improve sitting balance and trunk control. Next, they started working on leg strengthening, to prepare for walking. When she was in Florida, Gillespie was told she would never walk or be able to feed herself again.

She was determined to prove otherwise.

"Sandy maintained an amazing attitude throughout her stay at Transitions. She was also a cheerleader for other residents that were here," Johnson says.

"Sandy worked extremely hard to get her independence back and I feel blessed to be part of her journey."

Johnson was right alongside Gillespie on the day when she took her first steps and started walking again. "Matt is the reason I'm walking today. He gave me the strength, the encouragement, and the love I needed," says an extremely grateful Gillespie. "Matt is my hero."

In addition to an intensive physical therapy schedule, Gillespie also consistently met with occupational therapy

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Sandy Gillespie credits Perham Health physical therapist Matt Johnson with giving her the strength and encouragement she needed to start walking again. After losing all of her toes, Gillespie was faced with the difficult task of relearning how to walk. The NuStep machine was one of many physical therapy tools she used during her stay at Transitions.

staff. She needed to relearn how to perform daily activities, after having one surgery at Perham Health to amputate her toes and another surgery to amputate parts of her hands that had turned black while in Florida.

Occupational therapy staff worked with Gillespie on a variety of tasks she needed to relearn in order to live independently at home. For example, specialized kitchen tools were used to teach her how to cook for herself. With limited use of her hands, what were once simple tasks, like getting food onto a spoon or brushing her teeth, were suddenly quite challenging. Little by little, Gillespie says she learned how to perform these daily activities – each new success bringing her one step closer to being able to return home and take care of herself.

Members of Gillespie's Transitions care team met with her weekly to review her progress,

discuss the long-term goal of discharging her home, and encourage her in her rehabilitation journey. "The team would all gather in chairs around my bed," she recalls. "I appreciated how well they communicated, and the way they involved my family. They kept asking me how they could help me. I really felt like they wanted to make my experience better in any way they could."

One of the lowest points during Gillespie's stay at Transitions came when she developed MRSA, a contagious staph infection, and had to be quarantined. She was in a lot of pain, and the isolation was difficult. "I remember the nurses coming in during that time and reading books to me to try and boost my spirit," Gillespie says.

"When I was sick and miserable, those nurses would come into my room and try to help me any way they could. Even in the middle of the

night. I've never seen compassion like they gave. They took the time to listen to me. I was in a lot of pain, and I'll admit I wasn't always very nice. They gave me love and compassion."

After months of hard work and an incredible amount of determination, Gillespie recuperated enough to where she could soon return home.

Social services was highly involved in facilitating Gillespie's discharge, including connecting her with local resources such as home care, home-making services, equipment needs, county resources, medical alert systems, and meal assistance.

Kaylee Vaughan, social worker, worked with Gillespie throughout her time at

Transitions, starting right at the beginning, coordinating her admission and the transition from Florida to Minnesota. Vaughan mentions how Gillespie's family was extremely supportive of getting her back home, and they went above and beyond to make it work. The team at Transitions, which includes therapies, nursing, CNAs, house-keeping, dietary, and social services, worked closely with Gillespie and her family to come up with safety recommendations for her home setting.

Gillespie says she developed a strong bond with Vaughan during her time at Transitions. "She was very warm and reassuring. Kaylee came in to see me so many times," she says. "I remember that she would stop in just to say 'hi' whenever she was around. That meant a lot."

"Sandy was experiencing some of the hardest days of her life," Vaughan acknowledges. She says an important part of her role in Gillespie's care was making sure she had a group surrounding her that supported not only her physical and medical needs, but also her emotional and social needs.

"The most rewarding part of my job as a social worker is working with a team that cares about our residents and finds little ways to make them feel 'at home' in a setting that isn't home," says Vaughan. "It is an honor to be able to provide support to residents and families during challenging times of their lives."

On May 19, 2017, 147 days after making Transitions her home, Gillespie's supporters surrounded her and cheered as she walked out the doors and headed for home. Witnessing this incredible feat, Johnson says he felt such pride and amazement at Gillespie's accomplishment. "It was truly amazing to be part of her transformation," he says.

"The day when I left Transitions, I told everyone, 'I came in here in a wheelchair, but I'm walking out of here!' I had a walker with me, but I did it," Gillespie says with pride.

"They had to put up with me for 147 days. My care didn't change from the first day to the very last day. Everyone here, on all of the shifts, they were all so kind and compassionate."

Nearly two years have passed since Gillespie left Transitions and returned to her home near Otter Tail Lake.

She enjoys frequent visits from neighbors and family, especially her grandkids. "What I'm most proud of now is that I



Without the use of all her fingers, Sandy Gillespie found daily tasks to be quite challenging. Occupational therapy staff worked with Gillespie to help her regain her independence and learn skills she needed in order to be successfully discharged home. Missy Steinbach, occupational therapy assistant, uses a specially-modified cutting board to help Gillespie peel an apple.

Perham Living named among 'Best Nursing Homes'

**BEST
NURSING HOMES**

U.S. News & WORLD REPORT

RATINGS

For the third year in a row, U.S. News & World Report recognized Perham Living on its 'Best Nursing Homes' list. As the global authority in health care rankings, U.S. News & World Report evaluated more than 15,000 nursing homes nationwide in determining its Best Nursing Homes for 2018-19.

"It is an honor to receive this recognition for the skilled and compassionate nursing care we provide," says Tracy Hendrickx, vice president at Perham Living. "We work very closely with residents and their families to provide excellent care and quality of life. This recognition is a demonstration of the incredible care provided by our staff each and every day."

Since its inception in 2009, the U.S. News nursing home ratings have relied on data from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), the federal agency that sets and enforces standards for nursing homes. Two separate ratings are assigned to most nursing homes, focusing on both an overall rating and a short-stay rehabilitation rating.

Perham Living's rating for the quality of overall care, considering both long-term residents and short-stay patients in Transitions, is 'High Performing.' This places Perham Living among just 736 nursing homes nationwide to receive the

designation in overall and short-stay care.

To determine the 'High Performing' overall rating, nursing homes are evaluated based on data from the federal Nursing Home Compare program. Evaluations incorporate the nurse staffing, health inspection, and quality measures star ratings. Nursing homes are also assessed based on the appropriateness of the therapy minutes provided to residents, as well as the consistency of reported nurse staffing across self-reported and payroll-based reporting systems.

Short-stay rehabilitation ratings are a reflection of the care for people in need of skilled nursing or rehabilitation services following hospitalization for surgery, heart attack, stroke, injury, or other conditions. The data used to evaluate these facilities comes from the Nursing Home Compare program, and includes metrics of nurse staffing, patient outcomes, facility complaints, and routine patient care.

The U.S. News & World Report rating system is intended to provide consumers with comprehensive information about care, safety, health inspections, staffing, and more to make informed decisions regarding this important life decision. Individual nursing

home ratings can be viewed at health.usnews.com/best-nursing-homes.

"We are fortunate to have an incredible group of people working with us," Hendrickx notes. "As a result of the compassion, energy, and competence of our staff, we have once again received this recognition. I am proud to have the opportunity to work with the team at Perham Living."

Perham Living is a nationally recognized leader in older adult services offering post-acute care rehabilitation, home care, memory care assisted living, adult day services, apartment living, and a nursing home community within its campus.

can do my own housework. I do my laundry. I can give myself baths. I cook for myself. I love it," she says.

Reflecting back on the extreme physical, mental, and emotional challenges she faced during her recovery, Gillespie feels overwhelmed with gratitude for the excellent care she received at Transitions and the progress she made.

"I feel blessed because I came out on top," she says. "That's what I think about when I have a bad day."



After a long and challenging recovery, Sandy Gillespie is thankful to once again be back living in her home near Otter Tail Lake. She enjoys baking and having friends and family over for coffee.

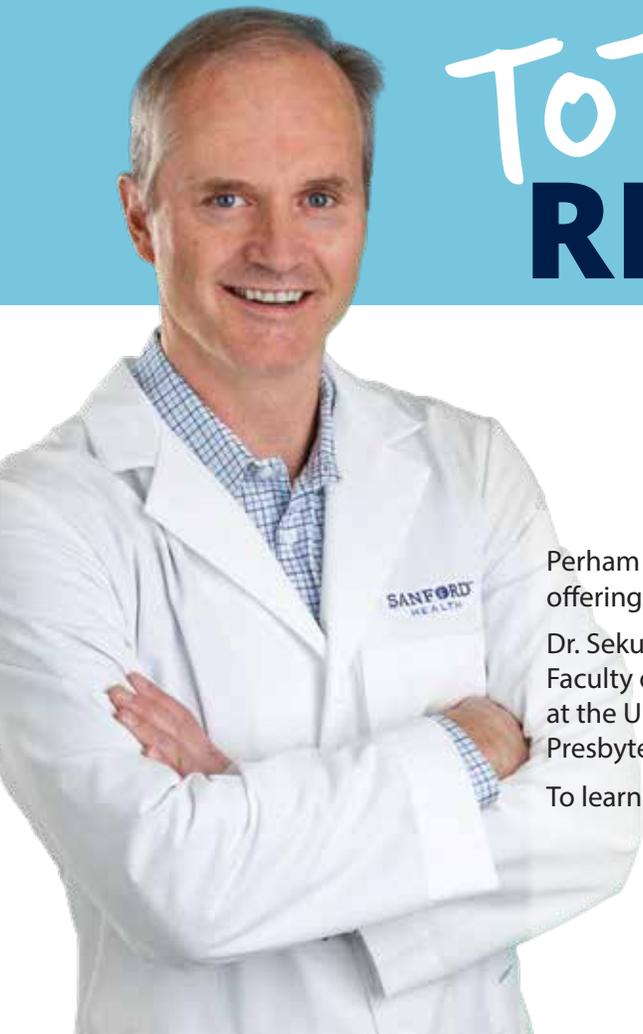


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Dr. Sekundiak received his medical degree from the University of Manitoba Faculty of Medicine, Canada, and completed his residency in orthopedic surgery at the University of Manitoba. He completed his fellowship in arthroplasty at Rush Presbyterian St. Luke's Medical Center, in Chicago, Ill.

To learn more about joint care at Perham Health, visit perhamhealth.org/orthopedics.

***Call (218) 347-1200 to make an appointment with
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