



Richfield

The Rehab Center at Richfield

[ Medicare physical therapy ] should be based on the needs of the patient as they progress through the calendar year.



— Karen Ellexson, Therapy Program Manager Richfield

## Making life more “homey” for geriatric residents

Karen Ellexson, Therapy Program Manager for Richfield, believes so much in the company she works for, she admitted her mother to the assisted living campus. While Ellexson recognizes how hard it was for her mom to give up her independence, she realizes, after her four falls in a month, how scary it would be if her mother wasn't living in a place with a support system.

“It truly is a privilege for me to serve the geriatric population,” Ellexson says. She notes the life experience, living history and being able to serve a community that didn't get the attention it deserved in the past as perks she gains from her job.

A big frustration she cites is the current cap on Medicare

# COVER STORY

physical therapy per calendar year of \$1980 currently split between physical therapy and speech therapy. She's involved in lobbying efforts to change this law. “This should be based on the needs of the patient as they progress through the calendar year,” Ellexson says.

She's excited her job helps her keep older people active, able and engaged, noting how much this has changed over the past 20 years. At Richfield, seniors are still driving, playing tennis, swimming, fishing, and enjoying outpatient services. Ellexson is focused on preserving independence for her patients as long as possible so they can keep doing what they love longer.

In mid-December, Richfield opened a recrafted second floor of their building based on a home model they plan to implement throughout the entire campus. They converted what used to look like a hospital wing into a suite complete with living room and fireplace, sitting room, a kitchen open 24/7, medicine cabinets in individual rooms instead of nurse carts and an entry façade with siding. Now, anyone wishing to gain entry (including physical therapist) must ring a bell to ask permission. Maximum capacity is 21 residents, which may include those suffering from dementia.



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Richfield has opened a “home model” floor plan on its second floor.



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From Ellexson's physical therapy perspective, helping dementia patients involves everything from determining the client's range of view and discovering what's meaningful to them to engaging them in sights and activities that stimulate their brains in the most productive ways. “Do they still understand written directions or do we need pictures?” she asks. This can affect how living space is organized all the way down to the sock drawer.

Ellexson has seen a lot of changes in the physical therapy realm since she started practicing. Earlier, she was expected to follow orders from doctors without the opportunity to give input on patient reactions. Now, she has a lot more autonomy and a broader skill set she can draw from concerning patient stress, inflammation and pain. Her job today includes offering ideas for treatment solutions in exercises, stretching, meditation and energy conservation. Eating good food, regular exercise, specific treatment for individual issues and experimentation have replaced a former emphasis on medication, she says.

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