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BONES & JOINTS SUPPLEMENT

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Returning to Independence: One Step At A Time

BY: MARLENE PITURRO, PHD

While a fractured hip or worn out knee are inconvenient for the young, these conditions can be life threatening for older adults. According to Hip Fractures: A Practical Guide to Management, between 14 to 36 percent of individuals die within one year of a hip fracture; many others suffer a diminished quality of life. People of all ages with joint repair or replacement need a rehabilitation program to return to the best functioning they can. For Bob Tripicchio, PT, DSc, President of Community Physical Therapy & Associates (CPT), whose physical, occupational and speech therapists provide rehabilitation services to more than 8,000 individuals each year at 22 Alden Rehabilitation and Health Care Centers throughout Chicago and the suburbs, each patient has a different mindset and goals that shape the course of their rehabilitation.

"We have some patients, with the support of a caregiver, who complete their therapy program at the SNF (skilled nursing/rehabilitation facility)

as quickly as possible so they can be discharged home, while others stay longer because they want to achieve the highest level of independent functioning possible. Before treatment all patients receive functional performance tests to determine the most effective course of treatment. Therapists perform a falls risk assessment to see what environmental adaptations that person needs to be safe at home," explains Dr. Tripicchio. For hip fracture and knee replacement surgery, much depends on whether the patient can bear weight on the limb, and their ability to withstand rehab's intensity and duration. "For patients who are fast tracked to return home in seven to 10 days after surgery, they may have physical therapy two to three hours a day, seven days a week," he adds.

Regardless of whether or not a person chooses a fast-track rehabilitation program or increases their stay to achieve maximum function, it is important to know what is necessary in order to function safely at home and reintegrate successfully into the com-

munity. The minimal requirements to be independent in the community are as follows:

- Walk a minimum of 1,000 ft per errand for 2-3 errands per trip
- Carry packages averaging 6-7 pounds (a gallon of milk) while walking
- Safely negotiate stairs, curbs, slopes; walk and look in all directions in a reasonable amount of time
- Safely engage in frequent postural transitions, including changing directions, reaching, looking up and moving backwards
- Walk at a minimum speed of 160 ft per minute (or about 2.6 ft/sec)
- Rise from a chair without using your arms and with minimum effort

While helping a patient with joint involvement overcome pain and swelling and regain range of motion and muscle strength are important to rehabilitation, other factors need to be taken into consideration. "Meeting each patient's goals associated with their preferred lifestyles, whether it's putting on their shirt independently or being able to negotiate stairs to go to

work, is what motivates them and us," concludes Dr. Tripicchio.



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