

James A Haley VA Hospital,  
Tampa, Fla.

# Rec and Sports Therapy Gets Vets Moving

**F**rom a recreation and sports therapy program that is second to none, to physical therapy and research departments that are helping to improve on the science behind the latest strategies and technology being used in rehabilitation today, the James A Haley VA Hospital, Tampa, Fla., is one of the leading VAs in the nation. Using multidisciplinary teams and working and sharing info with VAs and medical centers around the world, the Tampa VA is a great example of a hospital that has adapted and responded to the new generation of wounded warriors. And despite the fact that many of these service members have experienced multiple deployments and are recovering from a complex combination of mild to serious injuries, staff at the VA say they see firsthand the desire in many of them to return to normal activities, and for those who are capable, back to full duty.

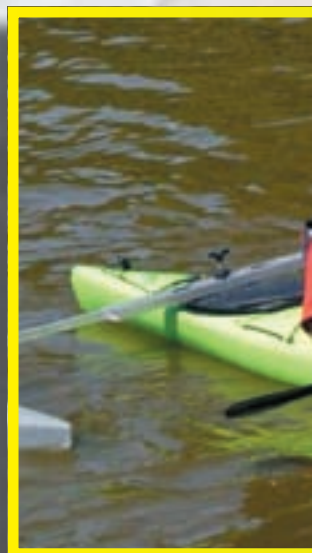
“We realized in the early part of this war that this new generation of individuals coming back from the war has much more of an interest in recreational and leisure activities, including those that are high-adrenaline in nature” says Dr. Steven Scott, chief of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, and director of Polytrauma Rehab. “So, early on we made sure that we had recreational therapy, and that we made a concerted effort to grow it, offer these activities in off hours, weekends and as part of an interdisciplinary team to rehabilitate these individuals.”

Unlike in the past, Scott points out that bingo just doesn't cut it anymore when it comes to providing social activities. “They want the more exciting or extreme adrenaline-pumping sports and recreational activities, and tend to want to push themselves and take on more risk.”

Scott points out that with the help of all of the incredible organizations and events out there for the disabled, and the advent of more advanced adaptive technology and equipment, the VA is able to have people participate in recreation and sports activities that they never did in the past.

“That is a big thing,” notes Scott. “To now have the ability to now take those with serious injuries and provide them transportation and opportunities for their families that we never had before. That has opened up the way they and we look at care because they are not just patients in a hospital, but getting out in the community — out in real life — and challenge them, make them feel whole, give them self esteem, train their skills for everyday activities that they like to do and give them the confidence so they can move ahead.”

The polytrauma department at the



Tampa VA Hospital has a multidisciplinary team that works in synergy to treat and care for the most extreme injuries. “We are dealing with a combination of injuries — spinal cord and head, for example — and it is not just rehabbing of one injury but a multitude of injuries,” notes Scott. “So they tend to be complex and you approach each case with multiple rehab teams and in settings where you can treat the multiple impairments at once. And we find that you can use recreational activities and adaptive sports as therapy for these polytrauma patients.”

### RECREATION THERAPY

In addition to the therapy pool, fitness center and full- and half-size basketball courts that are available for use, a lot of the recreation and sports therapy programming is done in the community, according to Jennifer Day, CTRS, recreation therapist, and adaptive sports coordinator.

“Our recreation therapists have received specialized training in a variety of sports programming such as sailing, golf, kayaking, scuba diving and hippotherapy,” notes Day. “Due to the demands of the returning wounded to provide adventure- or action-based activities we created an adaptive sports program, where we work in collaboration with community partners to provide opportunities for participation at the local and national level. We co-treat with other therapists (occupational, physical and kinesiotherapy) to identify strengths, weaknesses and adaptations to promote maximum participation.”

She explains that when a patient is admitted to the rehabilitation unit they are assessed for previous leisure interests and participation.

“These activities are modified to meet their needs and functional level, and this is continued throughout their discharge and their lifelong association with the VA,” says Day.

At the main hospital, clinicians have outdoor basketball, a shuffleboard court, a putt-putt green, horseshoe pits, as well as an indoor pool, and a variety of fitness equipment, including Precor Ellipticals; Concept2 rowers; Treadmills from Woodway, Star Trac, MedTrack, Quinton, Biodex and SportsArt; a Monark stationary bike; Row Pro software; an Explanar Golf Swing Trainer; and Wii, Wii Fit, Playstation2 and Xbox 360.



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# Veterans Affairs

The VA hospital is a leader in the area of adaptive equipment for recreation and sports. There are recumbent trikes/cycles, hand cycles, kayaks, wheelchairs for basketball, and adaptive equipment to help veterans play sports and activities such as bowling, soccer, track and field, shooting and rugby.

Over the last three years the staff has grown to meet the needs of this new generation and demands of recreation, including 12 new positions that have been created.

“Our approach has been pro-active rather than re-active in that we are promoting lifelong health and wellness to prevent future co-morbidities,” she points out. “Recreation and fitness provides opportunities for physical and psychosocial wellbeing, irregardless of level of function.”

Through education and leisure involvement recreation therapy provides participants with opportunities to be active in local and national adaptive sports, introductory clinics, events, and competitive games. Local programs include cycling, rowing, shooting, kayaking, waterskiing, archery, track and field, bowling, golf, yoga, strength & conditioning, basketball, sled hockey, softball, tabletennis, scuba diving and swimming.

National events and competitive games include the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, National Veterans Golden Age Games, National Veterans Tee Tournament, National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic, National Veterans Tee Tournament, U.S. Paralympic Military Sports Camp, Lakeshore Foundation Lima Fox Trot, Challenge Aspen Military Opportunities, Sun Valley Sports, Endeavor Games, Warrior Games and Dixie Games.

The delivery of recreation therapy services at the Tampa VA has increased and evolved to meet the unique needs of the injured service members.

“Recreation therapy services has always been an essential part of the rehabilitation process; however, differences in treatment include extreme sports, high tech adaptive equipment, interactive virtual programming, such as RowPro and Wii, and online communication such as Facebook,” notes Day. “The support is tremendous with the availability of demonstration equipment, new programs, new clinics and additional staff.”

Recognizing that wounded warriors live in the community and not in hospitals, the establishment of local and national community partners who offer excellent adaptive opportunities is key.

“We network with a multitude of community partners and private donors to provide recreational opportunities in an ever-changing world of interests,” she points out. “The true key to our success is to lessen reliance and dependence on the system and overcoming their disability as an excuse to not participate in life.”

The VA promotes a healthy lifestyle through recreation therapy and also has a MOVE program to keep veterans active, which is run by a health and wellness coordinator.

Recreation therapy coordinates with kinesiotherapy to assist MOVE participants in obtaining requested adaptive sports equipment such as adaptive cycles. Therapists work with the client weekly as a part of the MOVE training schedule, then writes a suggested home program using the identified device.

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Once MOVE is successfully completed, a request is entered to Prosthetics for issuance of the adaptive sports device. Pool therapy is also available, as well as therapeutic kayak evaluations and basic water safety in the pool.

### PHYSICAL THERAPY

There are multiple physical therapy (PT) clinics within the VA hospital, and one off-site outpatient facility located in Tampa. Inpatient clinics include Spinal Cord Injury (SCI), Inpatient Rehabilitation, Polytrauma/Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Polytrauma Transitional, Chronic Pain and Acute Care. The outpatient clinics consist of Cardiac Rehabilitation, SCI, Chronic Pain, Polytrauma Transitional, Balance and Vestibular rehabilitation, and the offsite orthopedic outpatient clinic. Additionally, a Locomotor Program onsite offers body-weight supported, manual or robotic assisted gait training and/or balance retraining. This clinic utilizes a Lokomat, TheraStride, and Zero-Gravity machines and incorporates assessment, pre-gait and balance activities using a NeuroCom Balance Master and Fitvibe, among various other balance training devices.

“We have some of the most advanced equipment in the world here,” notes Scott. “We have a locomotive gait lab to get people walking, and robotic pieces of equipment all in one area.”

“Each clinic is set up specific to the given needs of the patient population that is treated there,” adds Beverly Cheshire, PT, DPT, chief, Physical Therapy. “For instance, the Spinal Cord Injury clinic has wheelchair accessible exercise equip-

ment, over-ground ceiling lifts and large exercise mats for teaching exercise programs and transfers. Contrastingly, the offsite outpatient clinic has exercise equipment that predominantly meets the needs of the injured ambulatory patient.”

The Tampa VA Physical Therapy Department has developed and expanded programs in response to the growing needs of active duty service members and veterans.

“With a focus on patient-centered care and increased access, the department has responded to the growing need and developed programs, hiring highly competent, clinical specialists or by developing staff from within,” says Cheshire. “Promoting and supporting the professional development of staff has been a key. By encouraging staff to develop via higher education (such as the Doctor of Physical Therapy degree), clinical specializations or continuing education, ensures they are up to speed with cutting edge and evidence-based treatment/interventions. As examples, the department has recruited a clinical specialist PT to work with patients suffering from vestibular and balance dysfunctions and is in the process of developing one clinical specialist whose expertise is pelvic floor and urinary incontinence rehabilitation.”

Another factor that has led to the success of the department is the involvement of stakeholders/patients. Patients are involved in goal setting, development of the plan of care and discharge planning from the start. Goals and progress are focused on return to life/work/play/sport and function. Additionally, interdisciplinary teams work closely together to provide assessment and individualized treatment plans, co-



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treating when appropriate, to address the whole patient.

With the shift in demographics to a younger and overall more active population, it's necessary to use active and interactive equipment to keep them engaged and challenged to progress. "This population wants to resume their active lifestyle with whatever adaptations are necessary," notes Cheshire. "Numerous support systems have been implemented to address problems outside the scope of physical therapy practice (i.e. PTSD and vocational issues, for example), and resources abound to promote the patients being referred to the appropriate resources and providers."

She points out that physical therapists work with the recreation therapists in community re-entry and some sports programs.

"When neurological and/or musculoskeletal problems/barriers exist between the patient and activity, it is the PT who is positioned to provide the care and skilled services that can enable the patient to participate in therapeutic recreation activities," she points out. "PTs working together with recreation therapists can enable patients to return to a long lost activity or sport that can help tap unbridled motivation and catapult recovery."

The Tampa VA is the only VA in the country to offer a Post-Deployment Rehab and Evaluation Program (PREP).

"Unlike most post-deployment clinics, which are outpatient, this is a three-week inpatient program," notes Scott. "We bring the veterans in with these polytrauma injuries and we have a multidisciplinary team that works with them. This brings them into a more structured environment where they can do a lot more done than they would on an outpatients basis. It is a good program. We have teams to address all of the different problems they may have and come up with the best strategies for therapy, rehab and care. We are advanced in the areas of polytrauma care."



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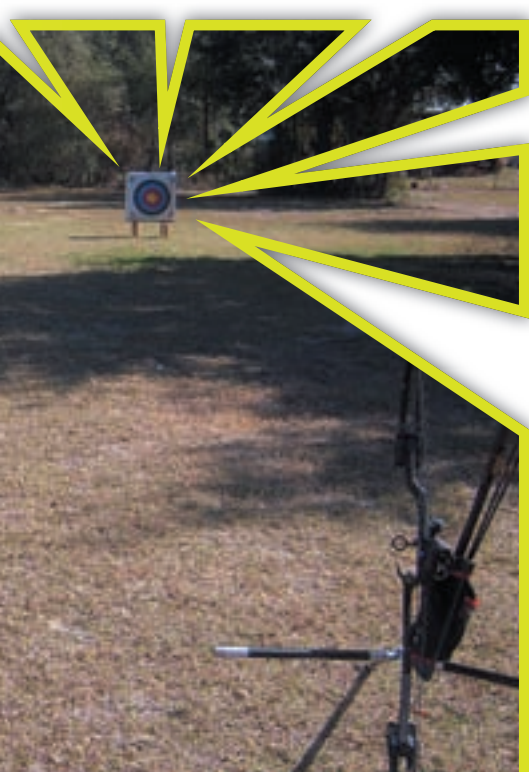
**RESEARCH AND ADVANCEMENTS**

The VA is also involved in a lot of research projects, from new screening and diagnostic equipment to new strategies in treating TBIs, PTSD, pain, and balance disorders, to name a few.

“Research is helpful because we are working to advance the science and then we know what is true and what is not true,” notes Scott. “It is vitally important that we do both clinical practice and good research, which is the best approach for a treatment facility. We try to learn from this research so we can improve our treatment and create proven treatment methodologies.”

One research project involves the complete review of all the National Guard healthcare problems and issues.

“Many have already been deployed multiple times,” notes Scott. “In addition to that project, we are looking at head injuries and sleep disorders, new medications and imaging techniques for people with mild and serious TBI. We are looking at innovative ways to rehab with new braces for arms and hands for amputees or those who have no or limited movement. We are studying balance and vestibular disorders and head injuries, as well as new ways of looking at polytrauma so we can better evaluate and rehab patients. We are also looking at the validity of



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screening tests that we currently use and into creating new ones, and into alleviating pain from these multiple injuries.”

In an effort to better treat the most serious injuries, in the coming years the VA is building a brand new polytrauma center.

“One of my goals of the center is to treat the catastrophic injuries that other facilities aren’t equipped to deal with,” notes Scott. “We think this will be a great environment for veterans and families to go to get the proper treatment and care they need. We want to be known for taking care of the most difficult and challenging cases. If we can learn from these worst cases, we can treat anyone.”

One of Scott’s overall goals is to work closer with the Department of Defense (DoD).

“One of the things that we are trying to do and something that I have been advocating for some time is to work more closely with the military on a performance-improvement model, so when service members get injured and come through Germany and Walter Reed and Bethesda to the VA, that we have a system for monitoring side effects, medical problems — their overall health care — so that when the next person gets injured, we know better how to treat that person and that case.”


Ultimately, Scott points out that it all comes back to getting veterans back to doing the things that they love to do, no matter what are the obstacles.

“With all of the advancements here, if you think about it, leisure time activities are just as important as a job, and the overall quality of life for people,” notes Scott. “These are the things we work for and look forward to, and these veterans are looking to and hoping to rehab back to the point where they can enjoy these beneficial activities as part of their daily routine, which is vitally important.


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