

Issue Stories

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Significant Strides

by Judy O'Rourke

Gait and balance assessment and therapy post stroke or injury.

Some 780,000 strokes are expected to occur this year. In the United States, 160,000 people die annually from stroke, making it the third leading cause of death—and the number one cause of adult disability, according to the National Stroke Association.

A stroke or severe injury can wreak havoc on cognitive and motor functions, but the ranks of survivors number almost 5 million. Significant strides have been made to boost patients' prospects for functional improvement and recovery. Physical therapists and occupational therapists are on the front lines, helping to restore patients' independence.

TECHNOLOGIES/MODALITIES USED DURING TREATMENT

The Second Step system allows earlier ambulation of stroke and other neurologically compromised patients by creating a virtually fall-free environment, says Lisa Stevens, PT, senior therapist at the Brain and Spine Recovery Center at Brackenridge Hospital, Austin, Tex. "While it may still take two or even three therapy staff in the most involved cases, initiating stepping as early as possible is critical to ultimately achieving functional gait," she says. "I was able to manually pattern symmetrical gait in hemiplegic clients while the device provided a firm forearm resting surface for upper-body support and extended the time tolerated for practicing locomotion." With the framework and the harness, she was able to move straight to standing and limited gait instead of being stuck in transfer training for the first day or two, she says. It makes the process possible from the bedside, which allowed the staff members to work without a dedicated gym space when necessary.

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