



Local News Welcome to Odessa, Texas

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Device helps stroke victims recover

Equipment at rehab center aids mobility

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Standing at a butcher-block table, Delmos Hickmott places brightly colored balls on pegs into round holes. Ruthie Lasater hangs balls attached to loops onto rods while Londa McKenzie places balls into milk crates at Permian Basin Rehabilitation Center. Mundane tasks maybe, but for these three stroke victims it represents light years of progress. Helping them do these tasks is equipment from Saebo, a Charlotte, N.C., company which makes equipment that gives stroke survivors a chance to recover use of their hands and arms.

The rehab center, which has its annual Easter Seals Telethon this weekend, got SaeboFlex in November, Director of Occupational Therapy Karen Wheat said. Wheat, a trained clinician and one of 530 therapists worldwide trained with the SaeboFlex orthosis, is helping patients increase range of motion and get their fine motor skills back. Three years ago, Lasater, 52, had possibly two or three strokes. She's in her sixth week attending sessions with Wheat.

"It's enabling me to open my hand, which I hadn't been able to do myself," she said of the device, which resembles a brightly colored splint with rubber fingertips. "I had some arm motion, but from the elbow down it was non-existent — like my brain doesn't make a connection to it. But now I'm actually having some feeling."

Although she has controlled high blood pressure, Lasater said doctors don't know what caused her strokes. Like her cohorts, Lasater practices her movements twice a day — at the rehab center and at home. When she has a spare moment in her job as a bookkeeper for Southwest Masonry, she works on her movements as well.

"Repetition, Karen says, is key," Lasater jokes.

Hickmott, a 71-year-old retired Odessa College art teacher, had a stroke two years ago and has been using the Saebo equipment since November. Along with his sessions with Wheat, he works another two hours at Sagebrush Wellness Center.

Before he started using it, his left arm hung at his side and he had no control over his motion. "I'm now able to make a fist and open it. I couldn't do that before," he said. "... This is the hardest work I've ever done." McKenzie, who owns McKenzie Insurance, said she's gotten some movement back in her fingers since starting sessions in January. "It's real exciting to see something that has some results from it," she said.