



Rancho Los Amigos

Post-Polio

Support Group

Newsletter - February 2010

## Our Professional Friends

We in the Rancho Los Amigos Post-Polio Support Group are fortunate to have personal and professional contact with knowledgeable individuals in many fields relating to disability, including polio. In this issue are two articles authored by some of these friends. The first is a review of a new study on assistive technology. The second addresses energy conservation.



In the latest edition of the journal *Assistive Technology*, there is an interesting article titled *Effects of Assistive Technology on Functional Decline in People Aging With a Disability*. Several people contributed to this article, including several professional friends from Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center. These include Dorothy J. Wilson, OTR, Bryan J. Kemp, PhD, and Judith M. Mitchell, PhD.

This study was designed to investigate the impact of assistive technology and home modifications on people with a disability. Participants included individuals with post-polio, rheumatoid arthritis, cerebral palsy, spinal cord injury, and stroke.

Previous studies have demonstrated that the proper use of assistive technology can help frail elderly people function in their homes for longer periods. Other studies have shown that assistive technology for newly disabled individuals is

*(Continued on page 2)*

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The information presented at our meetings and/or contained in this newsletter is solely for information. It is not an endorsement of any product, medication, or individual.

*(Continued from page 1)*

also highly effective. This study focused on individuals who are often described as “aging with a disability.”

The participants included 68 women and 23 men, with an average age of 62. All participants were interviewed in their homes, and an occupational therapist evaluated the participant’s need for assistive technology and home modification.

Changes to the way a participant had been handling activities of daily living were sometimes encouraged. An occupational therapist worked with the individual participant to improve these functions. Surveys of the homes for potential safety hazards were conducted, as well as close observation of tasks that the participants felt were difficult for them.

A control group was included in the study. Those participants had the same range of disabling conditions but were not offered the benefits of assistive technology, occupational therapy interventions, or home modifications during the period of the study. All participants, in both groups, were interviewed monthly and data was evaluated at twelve months and again at twenty-four months.

Assistive technology offered for home modification included grab bars, ramps, and widened doorways. Other items for personal use included bath transfer benches, kitchen and dressing aids, large numbered telephones, and seating modifications.

The study outcomes were interesting. Although both the intervention and control groups had functional decline during the two-year study period, the intervention group had a slower decline. The participants in the intervention group maintained a higher level of function during the first half of the study, and had decreased function only in the latter half.

The control group had no interventions of assistive technology, home modification, or occupational therapy. This group showed decline in function throughout the entire two year study.

The authors found that those in the intervention group were more likely to use assistive technology to maintain their independence rather than relying on others for assistance. This study supports the value of assistive technology for adults

*(Continued on page 3)*

*(Continued from page 2)*

aging with a disability, and suggests that it be provided earlier in the aging process.

The full article is available online at:

[http://www.resna.org/assets/393\\_effectofatonfunctionaldec.pdf](http://www.resna.org/assets/393_effectofatonfunctionaldec.pdf)



Another professional friend, Grace Young, was also a close personal friend to many in our support group. She was a polio survivor and an active member of our group for many years. Her good nature and helpful advice benefitted many in the polio community, including her numerous occupational therapy patients at Kaiser Permanente. Although Grace passed away last year, her good advice lives on. She wrote the following article for our newsletter in 1997. It is worth repeating.

## **Rest, Pacing, and Timing**

by Grace R. Young, MA, OTR

Fatigue and pain must be respected. Overuse to muscles is not always apparent while it is occurring. Muscle pain is a warning signal that the muscles have been overused. The damage accumulates over a period of time and may not become obvious until you lose the ability to do an activity which was previously possible.

### **Rest**

Try to rest at least one hour during the day. If you work, and resting at lunchtime is not possible, take a one-hour rest immediately after work. This will make your evening activities more productive and enjoyable.

Lie down to rest so your back doesn't have to support your body weight. Sitting takes 1/3 more energy than reclining. If you want to read, use an overhead book holder so your hand and arm muscles won't stay tense. You can listen to music, practice visualization, or meditate; the point is to allow all the muscles in your body to relax.

*(Continued on page 4)*

*(Continued from page 3)*

## **Pacing**

Have you had days when you felt so good that you took on an ambitious project and kept pushing yourself so you wouldn't lose momentum? Were you incapacitated for a few days after that? It is tempting to overdo on your good days. However, you'll be more productive overall if you plan your activities for a balanced lifestyle.

Prolonged activities, such as cleaning house or gardening, can leave you exhausted for the rest of the day unless you break them up into short segments with rest breaks in between. Before starting an extended activity, decide how long you will work at it and allow a 15-minute rest break every 30 minutes. Use a kitchen timer to let you know when to stop working and when to start up again.

Alternate light and heavy tasks throughout the week. Split your ambitious projects into daily segments throughout the week, and stick to your plan no matter how good you feel on any particular day. Plan fewer activities for the days when evening activities are on the agenda.

## **Timing**

You may have different levels of pain and fatigue at various times of the day. Activities which are simple to perform in the morning may be difficult later in the day, or vice versa. For example, if cooking supper in the late afternoon is too stressful, prepare most of it in the morning, to be reheated later.

## **How Can You Judge if an Activity is Too Stressful?**

The easiest sign is a feeling of fatigue while you are in the midst of the activity. This seems obvious, but many of us do not pay attention to our body. If the level of fatigue is out of proportion to the level of activity, the activity may be too stressful even if your mind says it should not be.

If there is a change in the quality of movement. For example, you develop a tremor or "jerkiness" in your motions while performing the activity.

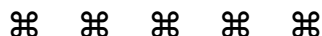
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(Continued from page 4)

If there is a change in the quantity of movement; that is, decreased range of motion. For example, you can usually lift your arm to a certain height but that height lessens as you continue the activity.

If you start to use compensatory movements. For example, you “hunch” your shoulder in order to raise your arm, or you swing your leg out to the side instead of flexing at the hip.

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## **Meeting Schedule for Post-Polio Support Group of Orange County**

*Saturday, February 13, 2010*

### ***Yoga for Post-Polio Patients - We can do it seated***

We will use a video from John P Murtha Neuroscience and Pain Institute

**Instruction by Yoga trainer Dolly Lai**

*Saturday, March 13, 2010*

### **Tentative Topic**

Wheelchair seating including a comparison of manual wheelchairs, powerchairs and scooters used by members of our support group

*Saturday, April 10, 2010*

### **No Information Yet**

*SUNDAY, May 23, 2010 Note: This is on a Sunday*

### **Update on Research and Treatments of Post-Polio Syndrome With Dr. Susan Perlman of UCLA**

For information please call:

Marte Fuller            562-697-0507

Marilyn Andrews    714-839-3121

Rancho Los Amigos Post-Polio Support Group  
Meeting Schedule

Saturday, February 27, 2010  
2 p.m. to 4 p.m.

**Annual Pot-Puck**

Support Services Annex, Room 1150  
(our regular meeting room)

*We ask that you bring your favorite picnic or finger-type food.  
We encourage you to bring family and friends.*

*We always have a good time!*

*We always have to time share concerns!*

*We always learn something!*

**Please join us.**

For information or directions, call Richard (562) 862-4508  
or Diane (562) 861-8128

This month's newsletter is published as a joint venture with the Rancho Los Amigos Post-Polio Support Group and the Polio Survivors Association.

Please send comments or suggestions to:

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