

Rehab patients 'walk on the moon'



APRIL 24, 2013 3:51 PM • [ISABELLE DILLS](#)

Inside the gym of a local skilled nursing facility, patients are using technology developed by NASA to “walk on the moon.”

The Napa Valley Care Center recently acquired the AlterG Anti-Gravity Treadmill, a rehabilitation treadmill that differentiates air pressure around the lower extremities to create a feeling of weightlessness during exercise.

Preparing to use the AlterG feels similar to equipping for a space launch. Patients pull on a special type of form-fitting exercise shorts that have an industrial strength zipper around the waist. Patients then step to the front of the treadmill — known as the AlterG “cockpit” — where the zipper connects to a bag surrounding the lower portion of the treadmill.

After the bag fills with air, the treadmill is set in motion. With their legs sealed in the air chamber, patients experience buoyancy as they walk as though they’re defying gravity and walking on the moon.

The purpose of the buoyancy, or weightlessness, is to create less resistance on the knees and joints, which prevents injuries and speeds recovery time, said Jeff Barbieri, the Napa Valley Care Center administrator.

The AlterG treadmill is popular among professional athletes and rehabilitation patients alike. At the Napa Valley Care Center, patients who use the anti-gravity treadmill are typically recovering from knee or hip surgery, a stroke, or cardiovascular surgery.

Being sealed in the air chamber from the waist down also works to stabilize patients and prevent them from falling.

“You feel safe in it because it holds you in,” said Lauren Robson, the care center’s rehab director.

For some patients, the device creates a feeling of claustrophobia, but many overcome that feeling once they begin the workout, Robson said. “People tend to like it right off the bat,” she said.

At the front of the treadmill is a video screen where patients can watch their feet and legs move within the air chamber. This helps patients to see how they’re walking and to correct any problems, Robson said.

The Napa Valley Care Center is a 130-bed facility that provides in-patient rehabilitation therapy seven days a week. Patients are referred to the care center through their doctors and typically stay anywhere between a few days to a few weeks, Barbieri said.

Two or three patients at the care center use the anti-gravity treadmill each day. Most patients use it for five to 15 minutes at a time, but some higher level patients will use it for up to 40 minutes, Robson said.

The AlterG cost the center approximately \$50,000. The care center is one of three skilled nursing facilities in the Bay Area — and the only one in Napa County— that offers the anti-gravity treadmill.

Information

For more information about the Napa Valley Care Center, visit napavalleycarecenter.com

For more information about the AlterG Anti-Gravity Treadmill, visit alterg.com