



TWO HOSPITALS, TWO SPECIALTIES, ONE CAMPUS

BY JASON WEBB

Carrie Gooch was a vibrant, out-going 28-year-old young woman. She had everything going for her: she had a solid job as a supervisor in a warehouse, was engaged to be married, and enjoyed time with her friends. Then, she got sick.

It started in October 2007 with a stiff neck and a really bad headache. Her doctor told her it was simply an ear infection. A few days later, a chiropractor suggested she might have meningitis. She did. A trip to the emergency room and a spinal tap proved she had the viral strain of the disease.

She had the option of going home or being admitted to the hospital, and she decided to go home. A couple weeks later, her fiancé rushed her to the ER. “She became incoherent, and she was acting crazy,” says Mary Gooch, Carrie’s mother. The meningitis was worse, and Carrie was in serious trouble. Medical Center of the Rockies admitted her and put her in the intensive care unit. She quickly fell into a coma. She missed Halloween, Thanksgiving, her brother’s birthday, and her own birthday.

According to Mary, Carrie was put on a ventilator, a feeding tube, and had a tracheostomy. Doctors thought she would be in a permanent vegetative state and weren’t sure if she would live. But, she did, and she proved a lot of people wrong by regaining her ability to walk, talk, and even go back to work part time. She was able to do this because of two incredible resources available to the Front Range and beyond: The Northern Colorado Rehabilitation Hospital and the Northern Colorado Long Term Acute Hospital.

The acute care campus is located just east of I-25 on US 34. It serves a large region, including parts of Wyoming, Nebraska, and the Northern Colorado Front Range. The campus has two separate and distinct hospitals. On one side is Northern Colorado Long Term Acute Hospital (NCLTAH), which provides medical care for patients who have been discharged from acute care hospitals but still need medical attention. On the same campus, Northern Colorado Rehabilitation Hospital (NCRH) helps patients recover from injuries and illnesses and regain their independence. Neither hospital, however, does drug or alcohol rehabilitation.

NCLTAH often admits patients, like Carrie, from intensive or critical care departments from local area hospitals. “We provide 24/7 acute medical care,” says Daniel Asadi, DO, who is the medical director for the hospital. “The patients we care for are sick enough to be in a hospital for a long period of time because they have complications or they are transferred to our facility to get the care that is adequate for a longer period of time.”

Where most large acute hospitals care for patients for an average of five days, the NCLTAH usually cares for patients for an average of 25 days. “We are a layer just below the hospital that cares for those patients who need another place to go to in the process of getting better,” says Asadi.

Brooks Stewart, the CEO of NCLTAH, adds, “Many patients would not do well in a less acute level of care because of their medical problems.” However, once a patient is admitted to the 20-bed acute care hospital, the patient has access to an array of medical services. Stewart states the major difference between her hospital and a short term acute hospital is the function. “We do not have an emergency room, an operating room, or obstetrics. But, we have the services needed to provide quality medical care,” says Stewart. “We do not diagnosis the patients,” adds Asadi. “That’s done in the large acute care hospitals in our communities.

The unique aspect of the NCLTAH, which opened in July of 2007, is the ratio of patients to nurses. Stewart notes that for the patients needing high observation, the ratio can be one to two patients per nurse and our medical/surgical unit ratio can range from three to five patients per nurse. While doctors, nurses and dieticians all make up the professional team in the NCLTAH, both Asadi and Stewart believe the patient and the family make up a part of the team as well. In fact, the family is often included in the patient’s progress meetings. “Everyone takes this work personally,” says Asadi. “People trust us with their lives. It’s a unique privilege.”

Within a short time of being at NCLTAH, according to Mary, her daughter had all of the tubes removed. “Dr. Asadi really did a lot for Carrie, and he still does,” says Mary. Carrie also believes the rest of the staff was superb. “They are very personable, and they genuinely care,” she says.

The other side of the hospital campus is the Northern Colorado Rehabilitation Hospital, NCRH, which opened in August of 2005. “Our goal is to get people home,” says Dennis Shelby, the CEO of the Rehabilitation Hospital. “That is what rehabilitation is all about.” To send patients home, the staff focus on improving each patients functional level to be able to return home as independent as possible and be safe.

The Northern Colorado Rehabilitation Hospital certainly achieves what they set out to do for their patients. “We currently discharge 82.6 % of our patients home,” says Shelby. “The national average is around 77%.” Those outcomes have paid off. Recently, NCRH was ranked in the top 10% of rehabilitation hospitals across the country for outstanding care that is effective, efficient, timely, and patient centered.

The 40-bed inpatient rehabilitation hospital is capable of providing rehabilitation to patients who have had a stroke, brain injury, spinal cord injury, amputation, orthopedic surgery, and many other conditions, injuries, and illnesses. Patients who stay in the rehabilitation hospital will receive three

hours of rehabilitation a day and have access to a state of the art 6,000 square foot rehabilitation gym, a warm water therapy pool, and specialized rooms that allow the staff to train and test a patient's functional ability. The outpatient program also offers a host of other programs to help improve the patients' quality of life.

"Every patient that comes to our hospital for treatment receives a functional assessment and an interdisciplinary care plan," says Joseph Jacob, MD, the medical director of the rehabilitation hospital on the campus. "We try to look through the clinical issues and the functional issues in a way that we can ensure success at home." Jacob also notes that it's not just physical aspects they take into account with their patients, but they also look at the social aspects that the patient and their family may face.

"Our staff is very passionate about what they do," says Jacob. Their passion shows through the number of people who have had care at the rehabilitation hospital: more than 1800 in two and ½ years. When a patient is ready to discharge home, a special overhead page alerts staff to gather in the lobby to say goodbye and congratulate the patient.

Carrie was one of the patients able to go home. Everyone lined up in the receiving line and applauded her as she walked through the Northern Colorado Rehabilitation Hospital's main doors. While she has some short-term memory loss, Carrie says, "I'm feeling good. I'm about where I was before I got sick." She attributes that to the care she received at Northern Colorado Long Term Acute Hospital and Northern Colorado Rehabilitation Hospital.

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