

Carroll County Times

Stroke victim using device to regain grip

By Greg Guenther, Times Staff Writer

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Judy Lindsay strained as she tried to lift her arm.

"It doesn't hurt," she said. "It's just frustrating."

She slowly moved a plastic grip up and down a small pole in front of her. The exercise is part of Lindsay's physical therapy regiment to help her regain the full use of her arm and hand.

Lindsay, of Westminster, suffered from a stroke four years ago that limited movement in her left arm and leg. She has trouble opening her left hand. When she saw an advertisement in a medical magazine about a splint device that could help her recover mobility in her hand, she tried to find a local therapist who would be able to help.

Lindsay said she consulted Diana Sirkin, an occupational and certified hand therapist who had worked with her before. Sirkin, a therapist for more than 30 years and certified as a hand therapist in 1992, had recently attended a workshop on the new spring-loaded splint.



KEN KOONS/STAFF PHOTO
Diana Sirkin helps Judy Lindsay with physical therapy for her hand.

Sirkin said she is one of only about 250 physical therapists in the country who have attended the workshop to be trained to use the device.

Along with other strength-building exercises, Sirkin wants to use the hand splint to help patients regain the muscle ability in their wrists and hands. The splint can help redevelop the squeeze and relax motion a hand makes for gripping objects, she said.

Patients can wear the splint for 30-minute intervals as many as three to four times a day, Sirkin said. Lindsay became her first patient to try the device.

Along with Lindsay's other exercises, such as strengthening her arm and shoulder with the plastic pole, she attaches the splint and works on gripping foam balls and other small objects. Lindsay likened the process to trying to lift a basketball off of a table with one hand, something she said she was never able to do because her hands were too small.

"Some of the results can happen quickly," Sirkin said. "But it's not like you're going to get better in a month. Everyone's stroke is different. Some people are stronger."

On Monday afternoon, Lindsay was able to grip a small foam ball, pick it up and place it in a bucket with the help of the splint. This was the first time she had completed the exercise since she began the therapy.

"So, you are making progress," Sirkin said.

For Lindsay, recovery has been slow. She even had Botox injected into her hand to relax her muscles. However, the drug relaxed them too much, Sirkin said, causing her to have problems gripping the foam balls and other objects during her therapy sessions.

Lindsay sees Sirkin twice a week, and has been using the splint since the beginning of the year, she said.

Now, Sirkin said, she wants to let others to know about ways for stroke victims to regain the use of their hands.

Sirkin plans to present a free seminar on improving hand function after a stroke at 2 p.m. Feb. 26 at the Westminster Physical Therapy office at 731 Baltimore Blvd. in Westminster. She said she hopes to develop a stroke support group so patients could get together and perform the strength and mobility exercises.

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