



Charles W. Johnson
photo

River Park patient Josephine Harper, left, works on her bowling form as part of her "Wii-hab" on one of the two Nintendo Wii video game machines the hospital has purchased for its inpatient and outpatient rehab departments. Looking on is nurse Kelly Hendrixon and fellow patient Brenda King.

River Park offers patients Wii-hab

By CHARLES W. JOHNSON
*News Editor for the Southern Standard
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The Nintendo Wii and its wildly popular accessory and game, the Wii Fit, is having a major effect on how individuals interact with their video game systems, requiring them to use much more than just their thumbs.

The physical aspect of the game system has not escaped the attention of hospital rehab departments, and River Park Hospital has joined the bandwagon by purchasing two of the machines, much to the delight of patients, both young and old.

River Park rehab director Tim King says the Wiis have been quite a hit, which makes sense since the system

includes a boxing game where fortunately nobody's nose gets broken except on the monitor.

"I'm a clinical social worker by profession and as director of the in-patient rehab unit I looked at what we could do to improve rehab. We had talked about the Wii a while back as a really effective tool in a patient's own home in doing basic rehab," said King. "I did some research, connected with a doctor I met at a rehab conference and he found that the way to make rehab effective is to make it fun. And what we found is by implementing the Wii we were able to make it fun, but also get the rehab in there, whether it be the rotation of the shoulders or utilizing the bending of the knees. The sports games with the Wii have made it fun."

King says some patients using the Wii aren't even aware they have been exercising.

"Some have come into rehab and done their therapy and when they get through, they say, 'Well, when are we going to do therapy?' not realizing they had just done it because the Wii had made it fun by making a game of it," said King.

King says patients have gotten into the competition aspect of the system as well, which further encourages participation.

"One patient is in her mid-80s and she had never bowled in her life," King said. "She bowled on the Wii, beat one of the staff and then bragged about it the rest of the day. That was fun for her."

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King says the program, which has resulted in playfully referring to the department as "Wii-hab," has introduced the older generation to the joys of the little, white game machine.

"We had a gentleman the other day who said when he goes home he's going to go buy a Wii," King said. "Because he realized as far as his rehab he can do that at home with the kids and it's fun."

The Wii is also included in outpatient rehab where it appeals to a wide audience. Outpatient rehab director Michael Thomas says the kids take to the Wii like a duck to water.

"The youngest we have is about 14 months old," Thomas said. "And we go all the way into the elderly in the 60s and 70s. We can treat the whole lifespan."

Thomas noted that one of King's patients using the Wii is 100.

"We're using the Wii for many different diagnoses," Thomas added. "Orthopedic and neurological for balance, coordination, strength and endurance. We use it both inpatient and outpatient because there's different skill levels based on where the patient is at physically and how they can benefit from them. We can tailor the games to what the individual needs."

Thomas agrees with King on the Wii's effectiveness.

"It's working well," Thomas said. "The patients seem to really enjoy it. In fact we've had a lot of patients say they're going to go out and buy one."