

Proven Therapies Help Those Living with **PARKINSON'S DISEASE**

For more than 30 years, people suffering from the effects of Parkinson's Disease have found relief through highly effective therapy programs developed in 1987 called Lee Silverman Voice Treatment (LSVT) BIG and LSVT LOUD.

Parkinson's is often characterized by physical tremors, an unsteady gait or difficulty with balance and range of motion. A lack of dopamine, which is a chemical that carries signals from one part of the brain to another, affects a wide range of motor functions such as eye blinking, swallowing, executing movements, standing and movement of the arms and legs. Patients often experience a decrease in vocal volume or unclear speech, difficulty swallowing and chewing, or the experience of foods going down the "wrong pipe."

Although the symptoms of Parkinson's disease can be frightening to those afflicted, great strides have been made in exercise therapies that not only increase dopamine levels naturally, but also serve to decrease the effects of symptoms.

Delivered by specially certified NCH speech, occupational and physical therapists, the LSVT programs help patients communicate more clearly, providing more opportunities for participation in social and physical activities.

For many people, social life tends to pick up in retirement. However, for retired Parkinson's patients, ordinary activities such as sports, golf or going out to dinner can present a number of problems. "They have difficulty holding a drink, trouble walking without tripping or inability to be heard," explains Karen Moss, MA, CCC-SLP, an NCH speech language therapist. "What happens is that these patients tend to become withdrawn in order to avoid the problems that everyday social activities can present."

"It is proven that exercise increases dopamine levels, which helps patients get better," says Karen Moss. "So, when you exercise the vocal chords with LSVT LOUD, dopamine levels are increased, muscles are strengthened and patients improve."

Karen, who specializes in LSVT LOUD, says that the only goal patients are given is to "think loud." "We then work on their breathing, their laryngeal and their articulatory function to maximize their speech intelligibility."

She explains that vocal loudness is improved as the voice box or larynx muscles and speech mechanism are stimulated through exercise. "It is simple and effective," she says, "essentially using repetition, imitation and a lot of positive reinforcement, which promotes positive results."

The companion LSVT BIG program focuses on gait and balance through a series of repetitive big and large movements that improve balance and trunk rotation, which

helps patients walk faster with bigger steps.

According to Sandy Hutchinson, OTR, an LSVT BIG NCH program specialist, many patients are thrilled to tears during the initial evaluation, when they are shown a technique to stand easier from a seated position.

"After the standard exercises, we do a set of exercises that specifically address the patients' daily activities - it is a tailored program to each patient's needs," Sandy Hutchinson adds.

Most patients do very well when they engage in both LSVT BIG and LOUD programs at the same time. The therapeutic course is 16 sessions at 60 minutes each, for four weeks.



Karen Moss explains an exercise to Dominick Festa using the LSVT LOUD program.

**For more information about the LSVT BIG and LOUD programs, contact the
NCH Outpatient Rehabilitation at (239) 624-1600.**