

3/23/16

## Patient Education Questions

**1) I am a healthy SCI VET and I really would like to get an overhead hoist in my apartment. What assistance does the VA provide in terms of working with an individual's apartment management team to help get a lift installed?**

Social work can assist you in making calls but they do not get directly involved in working with your property manager. The PVA can help coach you in how to address your property management team and advise you on ADA guidelines. The VA can do an initial installation for lifts in a person's dwelling but you are responsible afterwards for maintenance.

Patient's lifts are indicated for fully dependent or person who requires partial assistance for transfers. First consideration should be given to manual/hydraulic lifts.

Electric patient Lifts can be considered when:

- a) The safety of the patient is compromised.
- b) The ability of the caregiver to operate the hydraulic lift is determined to be unsatisfactory.
- c) Patients with permanent or progressive diseases.

Ceiling Lifts and Gantry System (Free Standing frames)

These lifts and gantries ((Free Standing frames) can be considered when conventional floor-based lifts cannot be utilized in the home environment due to restricted space or inability of the caregiver to maneuver the patient in a floor-based lift.

One consideration is if you are renting a home is that the VA can install the lift with the owner's permission however; it will not cover expenses for removing or relocating the lift.

**2) Aging VETs need more stretching and I have realized this as I get older. What types of stretching should be done? Are there regular programs for in and out of wheelchair calisthenics and stretching? What about Yoga programs for SCI?**

Maintaining flexibility is very important as it allows you to avoid tightness in your hip flexor muscles which when too tight can compromise your groin hygiene and limit your

ability to perform standing activities. Maintaining arm flexibility allows you to maintaining your functional ability to reach behind your head for grooming and hygiene activities. Having your Occupational and Physical therapists assess your flexibility and prescribe a personalized stretching program to target your needs is important. The VA does offer periodic Wheelchair Yoga classes and local places like the Riekes center offer exercise classes that incorporate stretching.

**3) I keep getting urinary tract infections. What causes them and how can I prevent them from happening in the future?**

UTI's are common complications that come with SCI because the neural connection between the brain and bladder is disrupted. Intermittent catheterization routines are performed on a 4-6 hour basis and volume voided should be around 500cc as a starting point. Indwelling balloon catheters can increase the risk of UTI's. Hand hygiene is critical with proper catheterization technique. Balancing liquid intake is the key and deliberately restricting liquids creating dehydration can also creates health risks.

**4) Is there a network of Spinal Cord Injured Veterans who are alumni of the rehab program and can be a resource for me after I go home? Can I connect with them on line through Facebook, Twitter or other social media sites?**

There are no online formal peer support networks made up of Veterans of the Palo Alto VA SCI program. However, it is possible to participate in our in-house peer support program by phone. It meets on the first and third Wednesday each month at noon. Contact Deane Denny [DeaneDenny@gmail.com](mailto:DeaneDenny@gmail.com). Online participation via Google+ may be available in the future. There is a weekly peer support group (SCI Connections) that meets weekly at Santa Clara valley Medical Center in San Jose.

Other online peer support groups for people with SCI include:

<https://www.patterson-net.org/sci-connections-on-may-16/> (SCI Connections – The Patterson Network)

<http://Facingdisability.com>

<http://Disaboom.com> (a LinkedIn network for professionals with SCI)

<http://PaloAlto.VA.Gov/services/mental/peersupport.asp> (for Veterans with mental health problems)

<http://TheMighty.com> (for family members of people with SCI)

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/womenwithsci/> (peer support for women with SCI)

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/SCI-Internatioinal/> (world-wide support group for people with SCI)

**5) What is a traumatic brain injury and are there different types and times for recovery?**

TBI refers to any damage to the brain that is caused by a trauma. Traumas have multiple causes including: motor vehicle accidents, falls, punches to the head, diving accidents, blast injuries, etc. The damage may range from “seeing stars” to death at the extreme levels. Common symptoms are fatigue, headaches, blurry vision, nausea, attention and concentration deficits, impulsive behavior, difficulty initiating behavior, and memory impairment. Symptoms may last for a day or two or lifetime, depending on the severity of brain damage. Most people with mild TBI recover completely in 3 to 6 months.

Patients who are also depressed or in litigation take longer to recover and may never do so unless their co-morbid problems are resolved. People with moderate to severe TBI usually show rapid but incomplete recovery in the first 3-6 months, followed by slower recovery in the next 6 months and very slow but continued recovery for the rest of the individual’s life, especially if the patient participates in rehabilitation. People with any history of TBI are at greater risk of developing Parkinson’s disease, Alzheimer’s disease and other cognitive disorders in later life. The risk increases with each subsequent TBI. Approximately 1 in 4 Veterans with SCI also experience TBI. The VA has excellent brain injury rehabilitation services.

**6) What are the differences between SMT and Paratransit and how do you obtain these services?**

Special mode Transportation (SMT) is provided by the VA for Veterans who are 30 percent service connected and or non service connected pensioned individuals). There is an application process that your social worker can help you with to determine your eligibility. The SMT service is only for transport to and from medical appointments. Paratransit is a city/county service and will transport you to leisure activities. It is a community based service. It however will not cross county lines.

**7) Who is a “Mandated Reporter” and what does this process entail?**

A mandated reporter is any of many licensed professionals who work with you. They are mandated to report observed and reported abuses of children, elderly, spousal and other forms of domestic abuse as part of their professional responsibilities.

**8) Who qualifies for skilled nursing home placement? Why would an SCIU Veteran be placed in a SNF and what are the costs?**

You must be 70% or more service connected to receive long-term SNF placement. This is not for persons who still have acute care needs. Medicaid or medical can help if you are financially eligible for your longer-term needs. You should speak to your social worker to help determine your eligibility and needs.

**9) I want to get a therapy dog. What programs are available and do I qualify?**

There are different kinds of dogs. Service dogs have the highest level of training (up to at least 2 years). Service dogs can assist you with environmental situations and are allowed special access to wherever their owner goes. Therapy dogs are also trained and used to interact with patients in therapeutic settings. Companion dogs are not highly trained like service dogs but are trained and provide what their name implies a “great friend”, they are not allowed to go whenever their owner goes like a service dog. Canine companions are based out of Santa Rosa. Another place to get information on dogs is Warrior Canine Connections. The VA Therapeutic recreation program offers Veterans opportunities to interact with dogs on Thursday afternoons and to take advantage of this great opportunity contact your recreation therapist.