



Stacey Nelson positions Brandon Knepher on Pokey, one of the horses used at San Diego Hippotherapy.

## Horses as a Treatment Tool

About 25 miles east of downtown San Diego sits a peaceful 26-acre ranch in the rural community of Lakeside.

It's home to a different kind of physical therapy center.

There are no machines or weights, no swimming pool.

But what you will find are rakes, wheelbarrows and horses. And in charge of it all, you'll find Stacey Nelson.

Nelson, an occupational therapist at Sharp Grossmont Hospital, runs a non-profit organization called San Diego Hippotherapy. Borrowing from the Greek word "hippos" for horse, hippotherapy uses the rhythmic movements of horses to treat children and adults with neuromusculoskeletal disorders, including cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, spinal cord injury and autism. The team works with 12 patients, ranging in age from 18 months to 36 years.

While several other programs in the area use horses for therapy, Nelson's organization is the only one to employ licensed occupational or physical therapists and speech pathologists.

Protocol requires a prescription and physician's referral just as in any other therapy session, and Nelson and her team evaluate each new patient to determine his or her best course of care.

"We look at how patients are missing certain movements and position them on the horses according to their needs," Nelson said.

Because a horse's movements mimic a human's, a person can learn balance and coordination by riding the horse. And just sitting on the horse while it walks stretches the rider's leg muscles.

"Even the act of brushing the horse's mane or pushing a wheelbarrow improves motor skills," Nelson said.

Although hippotherapy is relatively new and very little is known about its clinical outcomes, Nelson sees the dramatic results firsthand. One five-year-old boy with cerebral palsy who couldn't sit up or walk is now capable of walking with the aid of a walker.

Through a grant from the Grossmont Healthcare District, San Diego Hippotherapy will be able to serve more patients. For more information, contact San Diego Hippotherapy at (619) 390-8700.

— Bruce Hartman, Marketing & Communications

## One Step at a Time

Many events in health care are monumental, but it's the small, steady strides that make us great.

Take the day Mike McFadden, Physical Therapist at Sharp Mission Park, greeted his new patient, a woman with two wooden canes.

McFadden noticed the canes were too long and provided extra traction. He became concerned for the patient's safety, however, insisted she would only use the canes if they were so McFadden volunteered to make modifications.

He measured and cut the canes to the proper length and added rubber tips to make them slip-proof. When she came for her next appointment, she was excited to try her new canes.

At the end of the session, however, McFadden noticed the woman's vehicle, to find when she opened the door, she couldn't get her canes in the van. But certainly none that fit so well.

— Lorraine Iron Cloud, M.D.

## Precious Sight Brings Progress



Sharp Rees-Stealy physicians and staff custom fit glasses for children in Mexico.

After completing approximately 100 eye exams and providing 54 pairs of new glasses and prescription lenses, the team served the needs of the community and of Sharp Rees-Stealy physicians.

— Melissa Dummar, M.D.