

**PULSE**

# Step/Program may help teen to walk

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Before patients can begin the program, they are evaluated by a physician and a physical therapist. If patients respond well to stimulation, they're eligible for the program, which includes about 32 physical therapy sessions for the average patient. In these sessions, patients practice standing, working controls, strengthening muscles and building endurance.

They also practice taking steps, increasing distance and walking on different surfaces. Near the end of the sessions, patients practice how to get up off the floor if they should fall.

Currently Magee is the only

area hospital to offer Parastep. The hospital has evaluated six patients for the program, but so far none have enrolled. One patient didn't respond to the stimulation, and two felt that it required too much time or strength.

However, three are waiting to hear if their insurance policies will cover the \$15,990 cost of the program.

One of the patients waiting to hear from his insurance company is John Schneider. His father, John Sr., says, "The insurance company has not said yes or no. It should be funded. We're just waiting for them to break through the red tape."

According to Margie Roos, clinical specialist for spinal cord injury at Magee, John is a good candidate for Parastep because, "He's very motivated. He's newly injured, and he hasn't had a lot of deconditioning (of muscles) occur."

John wants to join the program because, he says, "I'm sick of sitting down. Plus it will keep my legs in shape. Your legs get like a skeleton, and I don't want that."

"My goal is to walk for graduation (in June)," John says

with determination, adding that he would eventually like to walk around the block.

Roos notes that Parastep "is really not going to replace the wheelchair at this point. It's generally an adjunct."

She believes that people can gain a sense of accomplishment by standing and taking steps and can receive the benefits of exercise as well. "Exercise decreases stress," Roos says. "They are able to handle stress better and are more motivated to participate in daily activities."

Sigmedics, the Illinois company that manufactures Parastep, estimates that between 30 percent and 40 percent of the 8,000 to 10,000 people who injure their spinal cords each year may benefit from Parastep. Over the past four years, the company says, 250 people worldwide have participated in the program with no known side effects.

"John has always been a fighter, and now he's fighting to overcome his inability to walk," says his mother, Mary Schneider.

"He can do anything he wants because he has the right attitude. It's only the paperwork that ties up his independence."