

Glen Cove Hospital's rehab for Parkinson's gets plaudit from national group



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Glen Cove Hospital recognized for innovative Parkinson's Disease program

Glen Cove Hospital recently was certified by the Joint Commission hospital accreditation group for its Parkinson's program, one of 30 hospitals nationwide. NewsdayTV's Steve Langford reports. Credit: Newsday Staff

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Glen Cove Hospital this month became the only hospital in New York certified to provide Parkinson's disease rehabilitation, and one of just 30 nationwide.

The 216-bed hospital's inpatient Parkinson's rehabilitation program draws patients from as far away as California, according to New Hyde Park-based Northwell Health. The two-week program provides three to five hours a day of services, including physical, occupational and speech therapy, plus dance and visual arts to encourage movement and combat the isolation and low spirits that many Parkinson's patients face.

The program is "an absolute gift," said Oyster Bay resident Eloisa Munter, 88, an artist who spent a year battling her insurance company to get coverage for inpatient treatment. "Parkinson's is a life-changing event," she said in an interview in her hospital room. "It takes control of the body, and every action, every second of your life is impacted. I was very keenly interested in any help that I could get."

Glen Cove's program was certified on March 14 by the Joint Commission, according to the nonprofit group, which sets standards for hospitals. To earn certification, programs must go "above and beyond" normal accreditation standards and monitor data to keep improving services, the commission said.

What to know

- **The inpatient Parkinson's rehabilitation program** at Glen Cove Hospital was certified this month by the nonprofit Joint Commission.
- **Patients get three to five hours a day** of services, including physical therapy, dance and art.
- **The waiting list is long**, with Glen Cove scheduling patients now to begin treatment in 2024.

The program aims to enhance patients' independence, mobility, speech, sleep and mood, according to Northwell. It is now scheduling patients to begin treatment next year. The long waiting list "underscores the acute need for this type of care," said Dr. Lyubov Rubin, director of the Parkinson's neurorehabilitation program at Glen Cove. Without intensive treatment, she said, many patients experience a "vicious, spiraling decline."

Parkinson's disease is the second most common degenerative brain disease after Alzheimer's, according to the National Institutes of Health. Roughly 1 million people in the United States suffer from the condition, according to the American Parkinson Disease Association. With most baby boomers now in their 60s and 70s and the condition typically striking around age 65, those numbers are expected to grow, researchers say.

The disease can cause increasingly severe tremors, rigidity and difficulty walking and balancing, as well as trouble speaking and cognitive symptoms such as confusion, depression and anxiety. Many patients fall and suffer head injuries, worsening their symptoms, doctors say.

The disease is estimated to cost the U.S. economy almost \$52 billion a year, with Medicare bearing most of the roughly \$25.4 billion in direct medical costs, research published in 2020 found.



Patients John Paskewitz of East Elmhurst, left, and Eloisa Munter, right, take part in the dance/movement class at Glen Cove Hospital. Credit: Debbie Egan-Chin

Programs like Glen Cove's are "extremely rare" in the United States, said Dr. Rebecca Gilbert, chief scientific officer at APDA. Typically, Parkinson's patients can get Medicare or a private insurer to pay for a limited course of outpatient physical therapy, Gilbert said. Inpatient rehabilitation generally only occurs after a patient is hospitalized for surgery or another reason, she said.

"Parkinson's disease, if left to its own devices, will get worse with time," Gilbert said. "There aren't any medications that have been discovered yet that slow the progression" of the disease, she said. "What we do have are lifestyle modifications: exercise, and diet to a certain degree. And exercise has been shown in various ways to potentially be this neuroprotective agent."

Dr. Adena Leder, director of the Parkinson's Center at New York Institute of Technology, an APDA referral center for Parkinson's patients, said she has heard "wonderful things" about Glen Cove's inpatient program.

"We call it, 'movement is medicine,' ... and dance is also social," Leder said.

It can be difficult, however, to get insurers to cover extensive rehabilitation treatment for Parkinson's, and there are not enough health care providers trained to offer specialized care, doctors said.

"The complexity of these patients, the cognitive impairment and the physical limitations, require experience and knowledge," said Dr. Guy Schwartz, co-director of the Parkinson's and Movement Disorders Center at Stony Brook Medicine, which offers outpatient programs in Stony Brook and in Southampton.

Preventing falls

Rehabilitation can help improve balance and prevent falls, which "are one of the most debilitating complications of the disease," said Dr. Bruce Mayerson, neurosciences chair for Rockville Centre-based Catholic Health, which provides outpatient Parkinson's treatment at St. Charles Hospital in Port Jefferson and other hospitals.

Glen Cove has offered its inpatient program since 2019. In addition to difficulty walking, many Parkinson's patients cannot dress or bathe themselves or even swallow food without assistance, Rubin said. For some, their voices have become so soft and slurred that they cannot make themselves understood. "They are absolutely in a dark place, and they don't see the end of it or the solution to it," Rubin said. Combined with the program's medical treatments and rehabilitation therapies, creative arts can help "unlock people's physical disability and emotional disability together," and help them "find the beauty again in the world," Rubin said. In some instances, singers and musicians who feared they had lost the ability to make music have given concerts for patients and staff after a two-week stay, Rubin said.

The hospital set aside 12 of the 28 beds in a new \$11 million rehabilitation unit for the Parkinson's program, said Kerri Scanlon, executive director of Glen Cove Hospital.

"We've had patients who've come here who couldn't walk for two or three years, who've walked out of the building," Scanlon said.

Before developing Parkinson's about nine years ago, John Paskewitz, 76, used to run marathons and play sports, he said. Lately, though, he has been feeling dizzy and has had trouble walking and preventing himself from falling. "I'd be holed up in the house all day," said Paskewitz, a retired actor and bartender who lives in East Elmhurst with his wife, Anne. "The biggest thing that depressed me the most was, I couldn't do things with my grandchildren."

The program at Glen Cove has helped him regain mobility and lifted his mood, and the movement classes remind him of his days taking acting classes, he said.

“The shuffling of my feet has dissipated,” he said. “I’m not totally there yet. But I am much better.”

For more information and referrals to Long Island resources:

American Parkinson Disease Foundation
apdaparkinson.org
800-223-2732



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