

Therapy at home away from home

■ Paoli therapist feels patients benefit from nurturing environment.

By Betsy Gilliland
Main Line Life Staff

Chesterbrook's Christine F. Hayes, a licensed physical therapist who specializes in the treatment of orthopedic and oncology patients, has practiced anywhere from a team-based hospital to home care programs.

With her new facility in a remodeled house in Paoli, Hayes said she has found the key to providing optimum rehabilitation, sports medicine and personal training services.

The key, she said, was "the environment."

With an enclosed front porch as a waiting room and cozy curtained rooms for exercise programs, aerobic conditioning and massage therapy, the office is more like home than most homes.

"Medicine has changed in such a dramatic way over the last 10 years," noted Hayes. "Patients want to get back to the basics with one-on-one care. They're not looking for larger facilities."

Although she sees patients with various needs, Hayes has carved a niche for herself in the treatment of oncology patients.

"Cancer patients do extremely well with a patient conditioning program," said Hayes. "My goal is to see them as early as possible. To intervene in the earliest stages, you can prevent a lot of the deconditioning responses."

The physical therapist has found the goals of cancer patients

differ widely from those of other patients. A cancer patient may undergo physical therapy to find enough energy to get through the day, to combat insomnia caused by fear or depression, to resume normal activities or simply to feel good again.

"The emotional and psychological benefits are many," said Hayes. "[Cancer patients] feel as if they lose control over their lives. [Physical therapy] allows them to regain control."

In addition, physical therapy increases their tolerance of chemotherapy and radiation and boosts their immune systems.

Linda Cox of Valley Forge, who underwent a total femur replacement to battle bone cancer, was under Hayes' care for almost five months in 1998.

"I basically had to learn how to walk because all my muscles had been detached," Cox said. "Most cancer patients have some residuals either from surgery, damage, chemotherapy and radiation. I would not be walking if it weren't for physical therapy."

She found the physical therapy was as just important for her mental well-being as for her physical health. "I've always loved exercise," Cox added, "So for me, it was a way to feel happy again."

According to Cox, Hayes understands that emotional needs of cancer patients differ from those of her other patients.

"It's hard to be tough with an oncology patient, but she realizes

that she has to push," Cox noted. "She's constantly aware that if she doesn't push, then she's not doing you any good."

Affiliated with The Wellness Community of Philadelphia, a support program for cancer patients and their loved ones, Hayes also offers workshops and support groups for cancer patients and their families.

In contrast with a cancer patient, the goals of an orthopedic patient include improving range of motion, strength and overall fitness level.

Ken Kedra, a route driver for a vending company who suffered a herniated disc at work last spring, began working with Hayes about four weeks ago. As part of his cross-training and strength training programs, he performs work-simulated activities. Hayes also has incorporated exercises to prevent future on-the-job injuries into his physical therapy sessions.

Hayes began working with Fran Atkinson of Malvern, who underwent a total knee replacement in May, at her home the day following her release from the hospital.

"She designed a program for me to follow when she wasn't there," said Atkinson.

In addition to her other services, Hayes also has access to a pool for aquatic therapy.

Hayes will host an open house and reception 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. Sept. 23 at her office, 163 W. Lancaster Ave., Suite 102, Paoli. The public is invited to attend.



Main Line Life photos — PETE BANNAN



Ken Kedra (above) gets assistance from Christine Hayes while jogging at her Paoli clinic, then performs some lightweight shoulder exercises (left) as he tries to recover from a back injury.