

TO MEDIA:

CONTACT PERSON: Robin Jennings

Marketing and Communications

Excelsa Health

724-689-0206 TEL

724-516-4483 CELL

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Electronic Photo (rjennings@excelsahealth.org)

Excelsa Health case manager Janet Loucks (left) and intern Brittany McGraw chat with Victoria Zimmerman of Jeannette in the Excelsa Health inpatient rehabilitation suite at Latrobe Hospital designed to measure a patient's ability to perform activities of daily living.

EXCELA HEALTH REHAB PATIENTS BENEFIT FROM STUDENT'S SPINAL CORD INJURY

LATROBE, PA, April 16, 2012 ... Brittany McGraw knows all about the patient experience, having been on the receiving end of care related to her spinal cord injury. .As the psychology major prepares to graduate from Seton Hill University May 12, she's training to enhance that experience for others by completing an internship on the Barclay Inpatient Rehabilitation unit at Excelsa Health Latrobe Hospital.

At age 15, the Derry girl was injured in a motor vehicle accident that resulted in a broken neck and quadriplegia. Three months of intense rehabilitation was only the beginning for the older daughter of Don and Sandy McGraw, who recognized then that she had two choices – give up or push on. Undeterred by adversity, she graduated high school on time, enrolled in college, developed a daily rehabilitation regimen that included teaching herself to type and write with clenched fingers and recently passed her driver's test in anticipation of the arrival of a modified van

What's she accomplished over the past six years inspires those she meets at Latrobe Hospital, particularly stroke patients and amputees.

Prior to the 2005 accident, McGraw wanted to conduct stem cell research, but biology lost its appeal once McGraw realized her story and her personality formed the basis for a social service career. She plans to enroll in graduate school for rehabilitation counseling, and anticipates future internships with the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Center for Rehabilitative Technology in Johnstown.

Well versed in community resources, McGraw, not surprisingly, finds dealing with insurance companies her greatest challenge. Assistive devices are of particular interest to the young woman, who would like to acquire a wheelchair that moves her from a seated to a standing position, which would help her gain further independence.

“When I talk with rehab patients or people who are living with chronic conditions, I know where they are coming from when they share their concerns or fears,” McGraw said. “I want to use my story and my journey through therapy to help others.”

During her 120-hour experience at Excelsa Health, McGraw is conducting patient assessments under the supervision of case manager Janet Loucks, documenting in the patient’s electronic medical record and implementing a new program called “Who Am I?” in which the patient is encouraged to complete a simple worksheet that begins “I am: ... and ends with “I am not just another patient in this bed!” It is hoped this simple tool will serve as a conversation starter to remind caregivers, visitors and patients themselves that they are more than an illness or condition.

Loucks said response to McGraw has been tremendous. “She is a real asset to our team, and the patients love her. She is able to discuss their care needs including home modifications, their support system including caregivers and community resources, and demonstrate there is a life outside the hospital.”

To learn more about inpatient rehabilitation at Excelsa Health, visit www.excelsahealth.org.