



Pat Besta, a volunteer and athlete with Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital's Wheelchair and Adaptive Sports teams, works out at the new Mary Free Bed YMCA. (Submitted photo)

MARY FREE BED

Rehabilitation patients' bridge to recovery extends to new YMCA

Musculoskeletal Clinic also provides direct-care access

By Betsy Musolf

The first health and wellness center in the world designed to be accessible to people of all abilities will be home to the Mary Free Bed Musculoskeletal Clinic. The clinic will serve as an extension of therapy to graduates of inpatient or outpatient programs at the hospital's downtown Grand Rapids campus. It also will provide direct access to care for competitive athletes, weekend warriors or anyone suffering from a range of musculoskeletal pain.

"Mary Free Bed's integration into the YMCA presents all kinds of opportunities that were never available before," said Curt Meyer, vice president of Outpatient Services at the hospital.

"First, we can see patients in the clinic with a wide array of injuries to the musculoskeletal system, from back pain to a shoulder issue. These are people who need to be seen by either a physician or a clinician for therapy but who won't first need a physician referral. If somebody's working out at the Y and they hurt their back, and they want to get in to see the doctor, we can probably get them in to be seen right away.

"Second, as Mary Free Bed patients progress and get better through their rehabilitation, we can bridge their clinical care into the Y," Meyer said.

When the walk-in clinic opens in mid-January, it will serve patients from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays. The clinic will be staffed by Mary Free Bed physiatrists and physical therapists who can provide screenings and develop a treatment plan for minor injuries involving muscles and joints.

Patients can expect a thorough physical examination and history intake. The doctor also can order studies — including musculoskeletal ultrasound — and perform any necessary procedures, such as cortisone and other injection therapy, to accelerate return to prior function. A team approach to care ensures open communication between therapists, physicians and the patient.

When necessary, clinic staff and patients can discuss referrals and/or evaluations with local surgical specialists in spine and musculoskeletal disorders.

The 1,400-square-foot clinic has a reception desk, two private examination rooms and therapy gym space that includes treadmills, mat tables and exercise equipment such as balls and bands.

"The idea is that after they're seen in the treatment space, they'll progress out into the Y and work with a therapist on the exercise



floor, in the warm-water pool, if they would benefit from that, or even a spinning class," Meyer said.

When treatment by a doctor or therapist no longer is required, the patient will be "bridged" to work with a Mary Free Bed or YMCA personal trainer.

"That way, there is consistency all the way through their fitness program, and we're ensuring they're learning how to exercise correctly to avoid exacerbating injury or experiencing new injury," Meyer said.

When therapeutic services no longer are necessary, but the patient wants to continue to use YMCA facilities, he or she must become a member.

The Mary Free Bed YMCA, which opened in December, is the first building in the world to receive Global Universal Design Certification from the Global Universal Design Commission. It now will serve as a global model for inclusion and accessibility for people of all abilities.

The 116,200-square-foot, LEED-Certified health and wellness facility will house Mary Free Bed's Weight Management program once its teaching kitchen can be scheduled for classes. The first-of-its-kind-Y also will be home base for the 650-plus athletes on most of Mary Free Bed's Wheelchair & Adaptive Sports teams and will house the hospital's Post Concussion services.

"The plan is to extend the continuum of services beyond what we currently offer to ensure that reintegration back to employment or school actually works on the first try without any rebounding of symptoms," said Pennv Adams,

team leader for inpatient pediatrics. "For high school and college athletes, this might include evaluation of biometrics during weight training for return to sport, as well as conditioning for return to the field, court or pool after being off for so many weeks with a concussion."

By offering the clinic at the YMCA, Mary Free Bed is providing an extension of services to its patients and to the community, Meyer said.

"We can only do so much here, and most of our work here is very clinical. But as people progress and get better through their rehabilitation, their expectations grow," he said. "If their expectation is to get back to running a 5K or to being in a spin class or taking a yoga class, then this gives us the opportunity to say, 'OK your goals as a patient can be aligned with the opportunities we have to show you how to get there and to do it in a safe and effective manner'."

"Their sense of getting their freedom back is when they are back to working out. It gives us the opportunity to define freedom from the patient's standpoint."

Mary Free Bed's integration with the YMCA presents numerous new opportunities, Meyer said.

"The common denominator at the Mary Free Bed YMCA is that everyone is working on improving their health and functionality," he said. "It's all relative to each person's starting point, but ultimately, each person is working on the same thing."

For more information, call Mary Free Bed at 616-840-8005 or 800-668-6001, or visit maryfreebed.com and select "Outpatient Services."