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Uplifting: Seniors build strength by pumping iron**Greenfield nursing
home installs
weight equipment**BY JOHN FAUBER
of the Journal Sentinel staff

A Greenfield nursing home is believed to be the first in the area to install sophisticated weight-training equipment for use by its very frail and elderly residents to improve their strength and mobility.

At a cost of \$21,000 for the equipment, SouthPointe HealthCare Center is banking on more than a decade of research showing that by pumping iron, frail seniors or seniors recovering from surgery or injuries can vastly improve their strength and their ability to undertake daily activities.

The newly-opened 174-bed center, which now has just five residents, is one of only a handful around the nation to install the new medical Nautilus® equipment, said Gary Reinl, national project coordinator with NovaCare, which manages the equipment for the center.

SouthPointe also will allow non-institutionalized seniors from the area to use the equipment for wellness purposes free of charge beginning in October, said Peg Perlewitz, director of rehabilitation at the center.

The equipment includes six machines for strengthening the arms, legs, torso, neck and lower back, as well as a recumbent bike for a cardiovascular workout.

The machines differ from traditional weight-resistance equipment in several ways, including the use of larger seats, which makes it easier to accommodate people who use wheelchairs, and weight settings that use smaller increments.

On a one-on-one basis, the equipment will be used by both long-term residents and residents temporarily at the facility while recovering from medical conditions.

Three residents are using the equipment on a daily basis.

"What we are doing is bringing the sports medicine model to the senior living industry," Reinl said. Sports medicine clinics use weight-resistance equipment to help people recover from sports and exercise-related injuries.

Over the last decade, a number of studies involving very frail and very elderly people in nursing homes have showed that weight-resistance training can produce dramatic improvement in strength and functional abilities such as increased walking speed or stair-climbing ability.

A 1994 *New England Journal of Medicine* study of 100 nursing home residents in their 80s and 90s, who were put on a high-intensity weight-training program, showed an average strength increase of 113%, an increase in walking speed of 12% and a 28% improvement of stair-climbing power.

After the 10-week training period, some of the test subjects were able to switch from a walker to a cane.

Also, a third of residents spontaneously increased activities such as walking to meals and participating in art and education classes.

Other studies have produced similar results.

"The evidence about resistance training is quite promising," said Evan Hadley, associate director of geriatrics at the National Institute on Aging. "They certainly can get impressive gains in strength over the short term."

However, he noted that the subjects in the studies started from a very low point and even after their big gains were still much weaker and less mobile than younger, healthier individuals.

"It is still quite rare to find sophisticated weight-training equipment in nursing homes, but based on preliminary research it could be beneficial," Hadley said.

SouthPointe, which is owned by GranCare, opened last month. It is both a long-term care center and a short-term facility for people recovering from strokes, surgery and other medical conditions.



Doris Brossmann works out on a recumbent stationary bike under the supervision of Physical Therapy Assistant Peggy Czarnik.