

Closed activity center opens doors to HFH therapy department

By Sara Konrad Baranowski



The Hansen Family Hospital Rehabilitation Services Department has temporarily relocated to the Dale Howard Family Activity Center on the Ellsworth Community College campus in Iowa Falls. Pictured above in their new home are (from left) Department Director Scott Krueger, DPT; Dave Moore, PT; Office Coordinator Lynda Krumm; Denise Renaud, SLP; and Kris Grimes, PT. Not pictured is Gale Bengston, PTA.

Many of the patients who visit Hansen Family Hospital for rehabilitation services can't afford to miss therapy, even when a global pandemic is keeping most Americans at home. So Hansen Family Hospital is taking steps to guarantee those patients can still get the treatment they need without risking contracting the novel coronavirus.

“With the positive [COVID-19] case in Hardin County and the potential of spread we really didn't want to mix and mingle well patients with possibly sick patients,” said Scott Krueger, director of Rehabilitation Services at HFH. “We started combing the area for potential landing spots where we could do therapy outside the hospital and keep things secure.”

The hospital settled on Ellsworth Community College's Dale Howard Family Activity Center. And on Wednesday this week, rehab services opened up its temporary satellite location at the fitness center. The building, which has an indoor track and exercise and weight equipment, has been closed since March 17, shortly after community spread of COVID-19 was detected in Iowa.

Ellsworth College Provost Dr. Martin Reimer said he was approached by the hospital last week, and saw the proposal as another opportunity for the college and the hospital, which work together on nursing education, to collaborate.

"Because of the governor's declaration we can't utilize Dale Howard as an activity center," Reimer said. "By renting it out to the hospital then they can operate it as their facility and so it's just a great way for them to keep their patients safe but still on track for the treatment that they need."

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Much of the equipment used by Hansen Family Hospital's rehab department is being stored in the Dale Howard Family Activity Center cubbyholes that are usually used by people exercising at the facility. [Photo by Sara Konrad Baranowski](#)

Krueger said setting up physical and speech therapy in the gym was fairly simple. Staff moved some mat tables, leg cuff weights and an ultrasound machine from the hospital to the activity center. They're also making use of some of the equipment in the gym because it's similar to what's used at the hospital.

Not all rehabilitation patients are still attending sessions. The hospital is trying to comply with social distancing standards as much as possible, so not all patients are still being seen in person. Some had a single session and were given instructions for exercises they can do at home. But other patients - 16 to 17 people per day - are being seen at the Dale Howard Family Activity Center.

"Acute patients, post-surgicals, those patients that really need our services - where risk of not having therapy outweighs the benefit of staying home - those are the patients

we're seeing," Krueger said. "We have a lot of post surgery patients who, if they don't get therapy they won't be able to function. You either do it now or potentially have another surgery a year from now because it's not working correctly."

Patients who attend therapy at the Dale Howard Center are scheduled to arrive at specific times. Patients are met at the locked door by a hospital staff member. They're asked questions about their current health, and their temperature is taken before they're escorted into the building. The patients' companions or drivers are not allowed to enter the building. Krueger said that's to minimize contact between people.

Some therapy - mostly for inpatients - is still being done at the hospital, but Krueger said the rest will be done at the activity center for the foreseeable future. If a therapist has to travel from the hospital to the activity center, they're required to stop at home to shower and change their clothes to minimize any potential cross-contamination.

It's a new routine, but Krueger said he's hopeful it will allow Rehabilitation Services to continue serving its patients while keeping them safe and minimizing the spread of COVID-19.

"We had kind of started to limit appointments coming to the hospital this week just for the simple purpose of trying to keep people safe," he said. "This just provides a little more safety."