

RANCHO ENTERS 2012 ON A HIGH NOTE

By Greg Waskul

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Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center enters 2012 on its highest note in nearly a decade after a spectacular 2011 helped solidify the world-renowned hospital's position as California's number one rehabilitation medicine facility.

"Rancho is on a steep upward arc, both in terms of the quality and quantity of the services we are providing for our patients," said CEO Jorge Orozco. "During 2011 we continued to expand our outpatient services, established enhanced medical homes for our patients and won major accolades for excellence both regionally and nationally."

Some of Rancho's 2011 highlights include:

U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT RECOGNITION

For the 22nd consecutive year, U.S. News & World Report recognized Rancho as California's top Rehabilitation Hospital and one of "America's Best Hospitals." In addition, Rancho was ranked eighth among the 140 hospitals in Los Angeles and Orange Counties and 11 Rancho physicians were named to the "America's Top Doctors" list.

MODEL SYSTEMS DESIGNATION

Rancho was one of only 14 hospitals throughout the nation that were selected to receive the Model Systems designation in Spinal Cord Injury from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research.

Under the Model Systems program, Rancho will receive more than \$2 million in research funding over the next five years, as well as having the opportunity to work together with other leading American rehabilitation hospitals on projects designed to enhance the state of the art of rehabilitation medicine.

"This is a giant step forward for us. Not only is it important for our research efforts, but it strengthens Rancho's position at the forefront of hospitals that work with patients with spinal cord injury," said Rancho Chief Medical Officer Mindy Aisen.

TRANSFORMING PATIENT CARE

A special Rancho team has been tasked with transforming the rehabilitation patient care model that has been the industry standard since it was established at Rancho nearly a half-century ago. The team is using advanced technologies such as virtual reality, new clinical strategies such as increasing frequency and duration of therapy, and patient empowerment strategies to improve the quality of care while helping patients return home sooner.

As a result of the advances made in this program, patients have returned to the community an average of 6.5 days faster while continuing to make similar gains in functional independence as patients who had previously stayed longer in the hospital.

"Our patients are seeing tremendous results from this program," Jorge said. "Bobbi Jean Tanberg and her team are to be congratulated for their innovation and hard work in establishing new care protocols that will help our patients return to the community sooner after suffering a major illness or injury."

ACUTE STROKE SERVICES

Under the leadership of Amytis Towfighi, MD, Rancho's Acute Stroke Service has become the largest stroke unit in the County in just three years. "We make sure that all our patients receive a thorough diagnostic evaluation in a dedicated stroke unit, that they are started on stroke-prevention medications, that they are educated regarding stroke risk factors, signs and symptoms of stroke, and self management," Dr. Towfighi said. Those who need early rehabilitation get it."

Dr. Towfighi and the Acute Stroke Unit have received many awards and accolades for their work, which has resulted in dramatically reduced lengths of stay percent and vastly increasing patient education and community interventions to reduce the risk of future strokes.

INCREASING OUTPATIENT VISITS

Rancho continues to shift its focus from inpatient to outpatient care and will complete more outpatient visits in 2011

than ever before in its 123-year history.

“Our outpatient visits have more than doubled in just a few years,” said Rancho Chief Clinical Officer Aries Limbaga. “This is a key focus of our patient-centered care approach, as we strive to help our patients spend more time at home and less time in the hospital.”

EXPANDING THE RANCHO WELLNESS CENTER

2011 saw a major increase in Wellness-related activities for both patients and staff. “We have had a dream of creating a Wellness Center for more than 20 years, and this year we were able to make our dream come true,” said Rancho Director of Rehabilitation Therapies Lilli Thompson. “With the help of L.A. Care Health Plan, we opened a dedicated Wellness Center that addresses all aspects of health, including mind, body and spirit. A wide variety of classes are now offered throughout the week, as well as self-directed exercise programs that allow our patients to move forward at their own pace,” she said.

SPECIAL PATIENT PROGRAMS

Rancho continued to provide opportunities for increased participation in its special patient programs during 2011, most of which have primary funding from the Rancho Los Amigos Foundation.

“These patient programs are a vital part of the rehabilitation process,” said Foundation Board President and former Rancho

CEO Connie Martinez. “Our patients often need a hand up to help build bridges to more independent lives, and we offer an array of programs that fulfill those special needs.” Some of these programs include:

- **The Don Knabe Pediatric Arts Program**, which attracted a record 20 students for a series of visual arts classes during the summer months. Three of those students — Jonathan Alvarenga, Jasmin Amador and Joel Castro — joined the Art of Rancho program this year. In doing so, they exhibited with noted Rancho graduate artists such as Robert Thome, Steve Clay, Ann Ruth and Ruben Rios in what is regarded as the finest art program of any hospital in the world.

- **The Performing Arts of Rancho**, which has blossomed under the leadership of Rancho patient Jay Cramer. “Since Jay began directing this program two years ago, the progress has been outstanding,” said Rancho Occupational Therapist Michele Berro. “We now have two major performances a year instead of just one, and Jay has also innovated with many smaller performances throughout the hospital and the community.”

- **The Las Floristas Wheelchair Sports Program** continues to lead the way nationally in combining athletic and academic achievement. Led by program director Rob Welty and longtime Futures program coach Rick Tirambulo, the program is building for the future with more

than 20 athletes under age 12 participating. “In addition to having fun playing sports, we view academic performance as a key driver to future success for our scholar/athletes,” said Las Floristas President Lisa Hansen. “We are especially pleased that every member of our wheelchair sports team graduates from high school, and that participants in this program graduate from college at a rate four times higher than the national average for individuals with disabilities.” More than 40 athletes received awards at the annual Las Floristas Scholarship Dinner this year in recognition of their outstanding academic performance.

- **The “Roll Around the Ranch” 1K/5K Stroke Run/Walk/Roll** continued its strong growth, with hundreds of Rancho patients and community members participating in what has become a signature event. “Many of our patients have to fight with every ounce of strength in their bodies to reach their goal, but every patient was able to complete their walk or run this year,” said program leader Angelica Molina. “Overcoming a stroke isn’t easy, but when you see the courage and determination of our patients, you realize that they won’t let anything stop them from reaching their goals in the event...and in life.”

- **The Spinal Injury Games** has nearly doubled the number of competitors in the last three years, to more than 300 in 2011. Los Angeles County Fourth District Supervisor Don Knabe, who participated in several events with

Rancho patients, said, “When you see how far these patients have come since their injuries and illnesses, it’s no wonder Rancho is the state’s top rehabilitation facility. I am so proud of each and every one of our patients. What they accomplish is truly amazing, thanks to the incredible support of the Rancho staff.”

“As we look out over the shifting healthcare landscape, we can see that Rancho is strongly positioned to continue to provide the very best care for our patients,” Jorge said. “No matter where the future leads, Rancho will continue to fulfill its destiny as a key element of the safety net and a brightly shining beacon of hope for those who need it most.”