

Smoke break lands Kansas native at Madonna

Rick Arb used to read the warning on his pack of cigarettes and knew he was taking a health risk by smoking. However, it didn't say anything about ending up in rehabilitation. He smiles and says a nicotine fix on Oct. 30, 2007, is what brought him to the doorstep of Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital.

"I had just eaten dinner and stepped outside for a cigarette," Rick recalled. "I was leaning against our wooden porch railing when it gave way and I fell hard onto the concrete below."

Rick, 49, of Melvern, Kan., lay sprawled out on the cold pavement for nearly two hours until he was discovered by his mother, Pauline, when she returned home from a meeting in town.

Rick was taken via ambulance to Stormont-Vail Regional Health Center in Topeka, Kan. where he underwent surgery to repair his damaged vocal cords, and punctured spinal cord, including his C7 vertebra. Doctors put a plate in Rick's spine to fuse his vertebra and recommended Madonna for his post-surgery rehabilitation.

On Nov. 12, Rick was admitted to Madonna in a weakened state and unable to speak. The former oil truck driver lost his voice for five weeks while his vocal cords healed. He wore a neck brace to stabilize his spine and was dependent on a feeding tube.

"I was only able to move my left arm and couldn't feed myself or talk, which was frustrating," Rick said. The nurses at Madonna gradually weaned him off the feeding tube. Pauline laughed and said, "Rick's first solid food was a celebratory hot dog!"

A goal Rick established early in his therapy was to walk. His therapy team used a variety of techniques to help Rick attain that goal. He credits the Bioness NESS® L300™ for helping him regain the use of his atrophied leg muscles.

"Therapy was quite challenging, but I treated it like a job," Rick stated. He showed up early and poured his energy into each session. Ricque Harth, Madonna speech language pathologist, commented "Rick worked extremely hard on the swallowing and vocal exercises, both during therapy sessions and on his own time." Ricque said Rick's voice improved dramatically during therapy. "Rick's voice eventually carried across the room, greeting patients and staff," Ricque said.

Another venue Rick utilized for his therapy was the kitchen in the Therapy Gym. He found it beneficial to



Rick Arb strolls the hallways with physical therapist Amber Harrington. Rick injured his spinal cord in late October and met his goal to walk by his Jan. 24 discharge date.

practice a skill he would be using daily once he returned home. His birthday cupcakes were one of his culinary successes.

Rick discharged on Jan. 24 and was confident to be walking with tripod poles. He is continuing outpatient therapy in Ottawa, Kan. and looks forward to getting his neck brace off soon. Eventually, Rick wants to get back behind the wheel of his pump truck.

"I can't say enough about the wonderful staff at Madonna," Rick commented, adding "And just for the record, a cigarette won't ever be touching these lips again!"