

Racer's recovery

The last thing 22-year-old Ryan Kennon remembers on Sept. 19, 2009 is executing a jump on the motor cross track near New Hartford.

"I was rushed to the hospital in an ambulance and then spent the next 11 days at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics (UIHC) where I underwent surgery," said Kennon.

An accident fractured and dislocated Kennon's spine – paralyzing him from the waist down. Surgery prevented further damage to Kennon's spine and stabilized his condition. Kennon was then transferred to St. Luke's Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PMR) for further healing and therapy.

"Once I got to St. Luke's they started working with me right away," said Kennon. "I couldn't even lift a two pound weight when I got here. I couldn't roll over or sit up in bed by myself. But with lots of work I gradually improved and I could do all these things and more by the time I left St. Luke's."

"Every patient gets a complete exam by a doctor and are also evaluated by the various therapists who will work with the patient when they arrive at St. Luke's," said Craig Dove, DO, St. Luke's Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation medical director. "We have a great team of therapists, nurses, techs and social workers. Everyone is dedicated to improving the patient's function. Our goal is to get people back to their home,

Ryan Kennon working on walking with physical therapist Megan Andresen.

caring for themselves and living a full life. We are very successful at accomplishing this goal."

Tailored therapy

Patients like Kennon who come to St. Luke's PMR work very hard. Each patient has a structured routine tailored to meet their individual needs. The day typically starts with dressing, grooming and breakfast, followed by physical, occupational and speech therapy depending on each patient's needs.

"Everyone who worked with me at St. Luke's was really good at their job," said Kennon. "They helped me conquer many challenges and learn everything I needed to resume my life. They were able to teach me the easiest way to roll over in bed, sit up and get in and out of a car."

"Ryan did a really good job of learning the techniques he needed to get around," said Dr. Dove. "We have a lot of dedicated team members that have worked at St. Luke's for many years with lots of experience so they know how to take care of these patients."

Kennon worked on those life skills for nearly a month at St. Luke's inpatient rehabilitation unit. Once he completed inpatient rehab he was able to return to his home in Maynard. Most patients resume therapy on an outpatient basis. In Ryan's case that meant – attending physical therapy twice a week, for an hour each visit.

Outpatient therapy

"We start bringing patients back on an outpatient basis to work on more aggressive type therapies," said Dr. Dove. "In Ryan's case he had a spinal fracture and dislocation. He had to be healed before we could do more aggressive things. So after Ryan healed he got out of his back brace

and we started working on more elaborate types of therapies."

Kennon is working on standing and limited walking during outpatient therapy sessions at St. Luke's. To do this, he uses special braces that help stabilize the paralyzed muscles in both legs. It has a system which help the legs move.

"Every spinal cord patient is a little different on their ability to walk with braces," said Dr. Dove. "You have to be pretty athletic, strong and healthy, which Ryan is so he's an excellent candidate. This system will be used for some limited walking in the household and help Ryan get into cupboards and things he couldn't physically do in a wheelchair. There are a lot of other medical benefits. When you're not bearing weight by standing and walking you begin losing bone mineral density very quickly so this will help keep Ryan's bones strong and healthy."

Staff at St. Luke's PMR also worked with Kennon to get him back to his occupation as a farmer where he works with his father and grandfather.

"They helped me find the equipment and supplies needed to make adaptations to some of the farm equipment in order for me to continue working," said Kennon. "I was able to help with the harvest last fall, will be able to help with planting in the spring and I am repairing motors and doing other needed maintenance."

"With Ryan's health and athleticism he should be independent in life and get around using a wheelchair, braces or crutches," said Dr. Dove. "He should also be successful in a profession and have a very fulfilling life."

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Craig Dove, DO, St. Luke's Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation medical director

"My goal is to continue farming and I may even resume motor cross racing again," said Kennon. "It's something I really enjoyed. I'm thankful I'm able to resume many of the things I was able to do before my accident thanks to therapy."

To learn more about St. Luke's Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, call 319/369-7331 or visit stlukescr.org.