

Hyperbaric oxygen speeds healing

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Hyperbaric treatment: Oxygen speeds healing for diabetics with wounds, it can avert amputations

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By Gina Morton; the Daily Item

LEWISBURG — James Hendricks relaxed under the covers watching Walker Texas Ranger on TV, but the atmosphere in this tube-shaped lounge was 100 percent oxygen. “Time goes pretty fast watching TV,” the 72-year-old Milton resident said of his 90-minute session before entering the hyperbaric oxygen chamber at Evangelical Community Hospital. “It seems like a long period of time but it goes pretty fast.” Hendricks has been receiving hyperbaric oxygen therapy for wound care since late January. He had four toes amputated and, because he’s diabetic, the healing process has been taking much longer. But the oxygen treatment — 90 minutes a day, five days a week — is speeding up the process. “The patient gets infused with 100 percent pressurized oxygen,” said Donna Ross, program director. “It helps stimulate blood flow, helps promote the growth of new capillaries and helps a problem wound break the cycle of the wound not healing.” Many of the patients who receive hyperbaric oxygen care — which became available in December — are diabetic with wounds, or also patients with injuries from radiation. Average sessions are 90 minutes in length, five days a week. A total of 30 sessions is normal. The hyperbaric chambers can also treat the following wounds: diabetic, venous stasis, skin grafts and flaps, crush/trauma/ burns, arterial/ischemic, pressure ulcers, soft tissue radionecrosis, chronic refractory osteomyelitis, non-healing wounds, vascular, osteoradionecrosis and surgical wounds. Many patients sleep, watch TV or bring DVDs while they’re inside the chamber. Medical Director Dr. James Morgan said the pressure inside the sealed chamber is equivalent to diving 30 to 60 feet into the ocean. “You can’t have a bad heart or lungs,” Morgan said. “You can’t be claustrophobic and we have to make sure we can equalize pressure in the ears.” Pressure in the ears is the biggest complaint from patients. At times, tubes will be inserted in the ears to relieve the pain, including Hendricks, who said he now has no problems whatsoever. “Before it was like going up in an airplane,” Hendricks said. “My ears would ring, buzz. There’s none of that anymore.” While the patient is enclosed, Laura McClintock, hyperbaric technician, stays next to the chamber at all times, monitoring the individual throughout the session. She can talk to them through a phone hooked up to the side of the chamber and is able to hear the patients when they’re talking. She also takes several tests before the patient goes in, including blood pressure and sugar. “I feel great,” Hendricks said. “I feel as good coming out as I was going in.” Both Ross and Morgan said the hospital is thrilled to have the chambers available to patients and there have been a number of successes preventing amputations. “We think it’s very exciting,” Ross said. “Evangelical is very pleased to be able to offer this treatment to patients as an alternative to wound care. It gives another opportunity to patients to get wounds healed.”