

Getting a Lungful of Precious Air by Weaning from a Ventilator at **Whitehall Boca**

—By Lucy Alloca—

Breathing: It's such a natural function that almost no one gives it a thought. But thinking about breathing—and struggling to pull even the tiniest bit of air into the lungs—that's something people stricken with various cardio-pulmonary diseases do virtually *all* the time. It's a hugely frightening experience and many require a "breathing machine," known to medical professionals as a ventilator.

If patients who struggle like this had the lung power to express themselves, they would scream for relief. Who could blame them?

Unfortunately, in hospital settings with ever-changing shift staffs, an overload of cases, and demands to move patients out as soon as possible, getting people off ventilators is often disappointing.

At Whitehall Boca, respected for its above-average rate in weaning success, patients experience

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an entirely different process and outcome.

First, all but one of the Respiratory Department's eight therapists have been in the field for more than 25 years each.

Second, patients being weaned from a ventilator are assigned the same therapist for each shift. Those therapists keep the same patients for the person's entire stay and they follow their patients with the comforting predictability of day following night. They track their patients' cardio-pulmonary status, diet, anxiety level, meds, labs and micro reports, plus their progression in physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy. In short, they get to know their charges almost like family. It's a powerful combination that allows Whitehall's therapists to be more aggressive in treatment.

Third—and unlike hospitals and many other facilities—ventilator patients at Whitehall do *not* receive bedside physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy. Instead, after initial evaluations, they're taken to the gym for therapy to maximize and hasten strengthening. It's important because as muscles build, the patient's metabolism grows more efficient and the individual weans more quickly.



Leslie Curtis

Finally, Whitehall ventilator patients also start talking with speaking valves as soon as possible. The valves improve patients' ability to cough and swallow. In turn, that helps clear the lungs more efficiently. In hospitals, speech isn't a main focus and valves typically aren't used. It's an crucial distinction for patients. That's because even an early ability to talk again is a powerful psychological motivator. Patients work harder to wean and return to their normal activities, and a beautiful, effortless lungful of precious air.

Lucy Alloca is the Director of Respiratory Therapy at Whitehall Boca. For more information about Whitehall Boca, please contact Leslie Curtis, Director of Business Development at 561-392-3000 or go to www.whitehallboca.com.