

PROGRAM: Interactive Metronome has helped a Waretown boy who has a disorder and a Toms River man who suffered a stroke.

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TOMS RIVER BUREAU

New therapy helps balance things

Seven-year-old Spencer Gerety was having difficulty multitasking and often got distracted by other children during classes at Waretown Elementary School. He listened attentively to directions, acting as if he understood, but then he would forget the sequencing of events.

Patti Gerety, Spencer's mother, was troubled by her son's inability to maintain his attention and worried that it would adversely affect his education. In January 2005, Spencer was diagnosed with central auditory processing disorder, in which information isn't processed correctly in the brain because a person's ears and brain don't fully work together.

When Patti Gerety learned a program called Interactive Metronome was available at HealthSouth Rehabilitation Hospital of Toms River, she enrolled Spencer, hoping it would improve concentration and mobility.

The results, she said, were eye-opening.

"It has had an absolutely dramatic impact," said Gerety, a teacher at Ethel Jacobson School in Surf City. "This therapy has pulled it all together for him. It has improved his coordination, his balance and his attention span. Before, you would give him a pencil and it would go flying. Now, he takes it and does his homework."

Interactive Metronome was introduced to healthcare professionals six years ago. It's a brain-based rehabilitation training program used to improve processing abilities that affect attention, motor planning and sequencing. It is used to treat cognitive and physical difficulties, including those caused by strokes, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis and developmental disorders.

William Mackey of Toms River suffered a stroke a year ago and has been enrolled in the Interactive Metronome Program for nine weeks. When he went to HealthSouth for his rehabilitation in December, he was using a walker to get around.

Now, he walks with a cane.

"My whole right side lost movement – shoulders, arms, hands, feet – and now the machine is teaching me how to respond to sound," said Mackey, 50. "It's like I'm a baby again."

"I have dreams"

In his dreams, Mackey is dribbling a basketball down the court and driving in for a spinning layup. It is the early 1970s and Mackey is playing for the Tuskegee College basketball team.

"I have dreams of me playing ball again," Mackey said. "I see myself coming all the way back."

If Mackey dreams big dreams, it's understandable. A year ago, doctors gave him 48 hours to live; they told his family to make sure his will was in order.

"I had never been sick, and now all of a sudden everything on my right side was affected by the stroke," Mackey said. "I woke up in the middle of the night, lying on the floor, and I couldn't move. It scared me to death."

Mackey credits a deep faith in God, his competitive spirit and new medical technology for putting him on the road to recovery.

With his cane, he moves slowly across the room and sits down in front of the IM machine. When he hears a bell through headphones, he follows a series of commands, alternating movements with his feet.

"Interactive Metronome helps the brain have better timing," said Suzanne Collins, an occupational therapist at HealthSouth of Toms River. "It helps the rhythmic aspects of the brain time better, and that in turn helps motor planning and sequencing. There are 14 different exercises you can do. A visual screen gives the patient feedback. If he sees green, he is right on. If he sees red, he's far off."

Mackey is seeing some green, and feeling good.

"I'm just relearning to do what my body once did normally," he said, smiling. "But I'm going to make it. I'm going to make it all the way back."

Big change for Spencer

When Spencer Gerety returned to classes at Waretown Elementary School in September, physical education teacher Martha Groh couldn't believe her eyes.

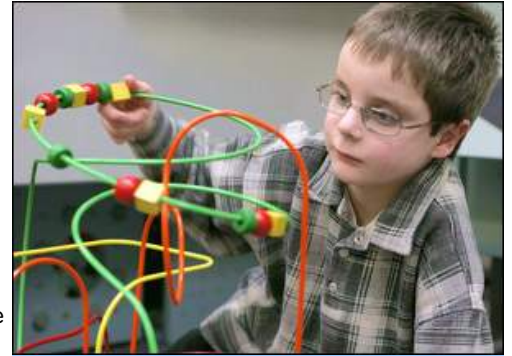
"She (Groh) came up to me and said, "What did you do with him this summer?" " said Patti Gerety.

The answer: five weeks of the IM program.

Collins, who worked directly with Spencer during his rehabilitation, said coordination changes in most patients tend to be "kind of subtle."

"But Spencer was huge, just huge," Collins said. "One day, he was doing things he wasn't able to do before."

Sometimes, it is difficult to get young children to participate in rehabilitation activities, professionals say. They are intimidated by machines and may possess a fear of failure, which tends to hold them back.



STAFF PHOTO: DARYL STONE] Spencer Gerety of Waretown plays at HealthSouth Rehabilitation Hospital of Toms River. He was diagnosed with central auditory processing disorder and was treated at HealthSouth.

THE PROGRAM

HealthSouth at Toms River has been using the Interactive Metronome Program for more than a year. It is a brain-based rehabilitation to improve processing abilities that affect attention, motor planning and sequencing.

IM is used to treat a wide range of cognitive and physical difficulties, including those from strokes, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis and developmental disorders.

There are more than 1,000 certified IM providers in over 800 clinics, hospitals, and school systems throughout the United States and Canada.

For more information on HealthSouth's program, call (732) 818-3600. HOW IT WORKS Patients are instructed to synchronize various hand and foot exercises to the sound of a bell heard through earphones. There are 14 different exercises.

Patients attempt to match the rhythmic beat with repetitive motor actions, such as tapping their toes.

An audio and visual guidance system provides immediate feedback. A low score indicates better accuracy and timing.

But Spencer saw the blinking lights of the computer and was instantly hooked.

"It was cool to work with the machine because of the computer," said Spencer, now 8 years old. "It has really helped my balance."

Now, Spencer isn't always at the back of the line in gym class. He blends in with all the other children – running in place, scrambling for the basketball – a joyous youngster.

"Some moms get thrilled when their child makes honor roll," said Patti Gerety. "Spencer is on honor roll and, yes, that's a big thrill for me. But I was never so happy as the day he came home with a satisfactory-plus grade in physical education. That feeling was priceless."