VA Boston Healthcare System
West Roxbury Campus
1400 VFW Parkway
West Roxbury, MA 02132

Spinal Cord Injury Center

Specializing in
Acute Care and Rehabilitation
for Individuals with
Spinal Cord Injury and Disorders

Serving Veterans with Spinal Cord Injury for over 50 years
Proud to be CARF accredited since 2000
Spinal Cord Injury System of Care

The mission of the Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) Center is to promote the health, independence, quality of life, and productivity of Veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D) throughout their lives.

Our nationally recognized SCI Center at the West Roxbury Campus of the VA Boston Healthcare System (VABHS) serves Veterans and Active Duty Service Members from all of New England. We work in a hub and spoke model to coordinate care with specified SCI teams at other VA medical centers in the VA New England Healthcare System.

Services are provided in a caring environment using the latest technology. The SCI team provides patient centered care that is respectful of and responsive to individual patient preferences, needs, and values and ensures that patient values guide all clinical decisions.

Team Approach

We recognize that each person served is unique and the treatment plan is designed with this in mind. We provide care in a team approach with multiple disciplines working together to achieve the best outcomes. You are the most important member of the rehabilitation team. You will help make many important decisions during your rehabilitation. Your team will have experts in spinal cord injuries including doctors with Board certification in Spinal Cord Injury Medicine, nurses, psychologists, social workers, case manager, dietician, and therapists. Depending on your goals, therapists may include occupational therapists, physical therapists, recreation therapists, vocational therapists, kinesiotherapists, respiratory therapists and speech pathologists who specialize in the care of persons with spinal cord injury. Each team member will explain to you what they do and answer your questions in a way that you can understand. Experts in rehabilitation, neurology, neurosurgery, orthopedics, pulmonologists, plastic surgery, urology, prosthetics and orthotics, and other medical and surgical specialists are readily available as needed.

Complete and All-Inclusive Care

We provide coordinated life-long services to Veterans with SCI. One of our unique strengths is the full continuum of care for Veterans with SCI/D. Acute care, initial and ongoing rehabilitation, comprehensive specialty care, primary care, outpatient care, home care, virtual care, respite care, and long term care are all delivered in an integrated system. Health promotion services, medications, supplies, and equipment are provided life-long to meet individual needs.

Initial Rehabilitation

The initial rehabilitation (or rehab) is a very important time; an injury to your spinal cord will affect many parts of your life. Initial rehabilitation is typically provided in the inpatient setting. What you do during your initial rehab will depend in part on where your spinal cord was injured and on how badly it was hurt. The initial rehabilitation is where you will work with a rehabilitation team to figure out how the injury will affect you and provide the healing, treatment
and education you may need. It will give you the skills you need to live and work with a spinal cord injury.

During the initial rehab, you will work to improve your function and independence. The initial rehab is also a time for learning. You will learn about skills to prepare for life roles both personally and as a part of a family, on a job, and in society.

After the period of initial rehabilitation, we also provide ongoing rehabilitation and life-long care. The ongoing rehabilitation will be part of the medical and health care you get for the rest of your life. The ongoing care and rehabilitation will help you prevent new problems and adapt to any changes in your life. It will also help to catch problems early and treat them when they occur.

**Services Provided:**
- Medical and rehabilitation management by physicians who are board certified in SCI
- Rehabilitation nursing
- Physical therapy including mobility training, strengthening, and endurance training
- Occupational therapy for self-care and living skills
- Seating evaluation and wheelchair prescription/ maintenance
- Assistive Technology Program to assess your individual needs and help in selecting, learning and using equipment to increase functioning
- Aquatic or pool therapy
- Education in altered body function after SCI for persons served, families, and care-givers
- Therapeutic recreation, including a very active adaptive sports program for all seasons
- Vocational rehabilitation to assist with job training and competitive employment
- Driver’s training and evaluation
- Social work services including assistance with benefits, community resources, community agency referrals, accessible housing options and for patient, family, and caregiver support
- Emotional and psychological support through individual, couples, family therapy and family and caregiver support groups
- Respiratory therapy
- Ventilator management
- Bowel and bladder management including urological evaluation
- Sexuality and reproductive health education and counseling
- Pain management
- Management of muscle tone and spasticity, including implantation and refilling of Baclofen pumps
- Specialized wound care and prevention
- Independent Living apartment is available on site to apply new skills in an adapted environment prior to discharge home
- Telehealth to connect with the SCI team from home or from another VA facility
- Assessment for home and/or work-place accessibility
- SCI-Home Care for training, problem-solving, and follow-up after return to home
- Annual Checkups for yearly wellness checks with a focus on prevention and early identification of problems related to SCI.
- Outpatient Services for ongoing medical and rehabilitation follow-up and treatment
- Respite care services
- Peer Mentor Program supported by individuals with SCI/D who share experiences and helpful strategies

Close collaboration with other departments provides easy access to additional services for Veterans with SCI. These include Prosthetics and Orthotics, Durable Medical Equipment, Plastic Surgery, Neurosurgery, Urology services, Pulmonary Function Tests, Speech-Language Pathology, Medical Nutrition therapy, and Chaplain Services.

We also work closely with Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), an outside non-profit Veteran Service Organization that is available to work with Veterans and provide assistance with getting earned benefits and resources

**Additional Benefits**

Thanks to a recent law, the Caregiver and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010, Veterans with a spinal cord injury now qualify for an exemption from inpatient, outpatient and prescription copayments.

Durable Medical Equipment (DME) is provided free of charge when medically indicated. (Examples include a ramp, hospital bed, Hoyer lift, shower chair/commode, specialty mattresses and specialized wheelchairs)
Home Adaptation: Depending on eligibility, Veterans may qualify to receive assistance for home improvements to improve home access under the HISA Grant Home Improvements and Structural Alterations (HISA) program. Your SCI Social Worker can provide additional information about eligibility requirements and benefits of this program.

A Fisher House on campus allows family members to be close to their loved ones during hospitalization. It is available to families and loved ones at no charge.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the number and characteristics of your patients?

We currently serve 542 Veterans with Spinal Cord Injury or Disorder (SCI/D). The characteristics of these patients are shown below. During Fiscal Year 2014, thirty-two Veterans with new onset SCI/D underwent comprehensive inpatient rehabilitation in our program.

We serve patients with SCI/D due to both traumatic and non-traumatic causes in about equal proportion. Traumatic SCI is most commonly related to falls, followed by motor vehicle accidents. The most common causes of non-traumatic SCI/D are spine stenosis or spondylosis.

Will my family / support system be involved in my rehabilitation?

Families / support system are actively encouraged to participate in the patient’s rehabilitation. Those that live more than 50 miles from our facility are invited to stay at no charge in our 20-room “Fisher House” on the West Roxbury campus of the VA Boston Healthcare System.

How long do people stay in the program? What is the average number of hours of treatment per inpatient day?

On average, people spend about 9 weeks in our acute inpatient rehabilitation program, but it can vary greatly and depends on many factors including the level and completeness of injury, individual needs and goals, and associated complications or pre-existing problems.
Rehabilitation nursing care is available 24 hours per day. Psychosocial, nutrition, physical therapy, occupational therapy, kinesiotherapy, speech pathology, vocational rehabilitation care are provided Monday through Saturday as clinically indicated. The average number of treatment hours is 6 per day.

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*How many patients had an unplanned transfer to an acute medical facility?*

VA Boston Healthcare System provides the full spectrum of acute medical/surgical care. Patients needing acute care do not have to be transferred to another hospital. In FY2014, no patients had an unplanned transfer to an Intensive Care Unit within VABHS.

*What are the outcomes of your program?*

The SCI/D Program evaluates the quality of the services provided to our patients on an ongoing basis. Recent four-year aggregate data demonstrates higher average gains in motor function
overall, achieved in a shorter time than national VA benchmarks. We also measure the percentage of patients living in a community setting after discharge from our Comprehensive Acute Rehabilitation Program for spinal cord injury and disorders. Sometimes we discharge people from inpatient rehabilitation to another facility temporarily so they can be closer to family while their home is being modified or to make sure that all local services needed are set up before they return home. This is why we focus on measuring community living at 90-days after discharge. The target we set for ourselves for this measure is 90%. The national average for all VA SCI Centers was 87% for this measure. In FY 2014, we exceeded our target as well as the national average with 93% of patients residing in the community at 90 days post-discharge from our program.

How satisfied are your patients?

The program surveys patients at discharge from acute rehabilitation, at annual outpatient evaluations and at discharge from the home care program. The overall satisfaction rates (an average of “agree” or “strongly agree” responses to questions indicating satisfaction with our program) for FY2012 through FY2014 are graphed below. The Acute Rehab Program changed its survey process in FY12 so rates are not available for that year.
What is the average number of outpatient visits?
In FY2014, patients averaged about 2 visits per year in the SCI Clinic. The minimum recommended is one visit for an annual comprehensive health evaluation. Additional visits were focused on specific medical issues. The SCI Outpatient Clinic is open Monday – Friday; 8am-4:30pm.

Admission
We serve Veterans and Active Duty Service Members with spinal cord injuries and disorders. Individuals are admitted if they meet eligibility criteria per established VA policy and are 18 years of age or older.

Referrals
A referral may be initiated by the individual, family, physician, social worker or case manager.

Payer Sources
Private insurance maybe billed if the Veteran is insured, however the Veteran will not receive a bill for anything insurance does not cover.

Fees
Thanks to a recent law, the Caregiver and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010, Veterans with a spinal cord injury now qualify for an exemption from inpatient, outpatient and prescription copayments. If you have questions about your classification or service connected disability, ask to speak to a social worker or benefits officer.

To contact the SCI Service
The SCI admissions office at the West Roxbury Campus of the VA Boston Healthcare System is open Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., room A-204. Telephone (857) 203-6574, Fax (857) 203-5553.

For acute referrals after hours, call the West Roxbury Campus at (617) 323-7700 and ask the operator to page the on-call SCI physician.

Tours can be arranged through the SCI Inpatient Social Worker at 857-203-6126.

Our website is www.boston.va.gov/services/spinal_cord_injury.asp
VA Boston Healthcare System

The Medical Center is a 615 bed hospital affiliated with Harvard Medical School, Boston University School of Medicine and Tufts University School of Medicine which provides tertiary medical, surgical, psychiatric, neurologic and spinal cord injury services. Its three campuses are in West Roxbury, Jamaica Plain and Brockton, Massachusetts.