

Q & A:

With Dr. Brock Bowman, Associate Medical Director of Shepherd Center

Q: Why did you decide to become a doctor?

A: There are two reasons. As a high school football player, I tore a ligament in my knee and had to undergo almost a year of rehabilitation before I could return to playing high school sports. Also, I was very fortunate to play for Coach Charlie Wedemeyer, a former All-American quarterback for Michigan State University, who has Lou Gehrig's disease. He is unable to talk or move his arms or legs, yet he was the head football coach. From a golf cart, he called the plays through his wife, who read his lips and then hand-signaled them to me on the field. So I became interested in becoming a doctor because of this early introduction in my life to rehabilitating myself and seeing someone close to me excel and contribute despite a severe disability.

Q: Explain your specialty in physiatry.

A: Physiatrists specialize in treating the medical needs of people with physical and/or cognitive disabilities. The discipline was founded in the early 1900s, became a separate medical field in 1947 and then became well established in the 1950s with the polio pandemic. Physiatry now encompasses treatment for people with spinal cord and/or brain injuries, as well as people with limb amputations, strokes, neuromuscular diseases, and many other diseases and injuries.

Q: How does your experience and Shepherd Center's approach benefit this patient population?

A: We often see people with very substantial disabilities go on to do amazing, productive things in their lives. We know what is possible, so we take this can-do approach with every patient. We walk a thin line between helping patients deal with reality and finding hope. We're truthful. We will teach you to do the things you need to learn to do for yourself. But we also want patients to maintain hope for the future. There's research under way, there's divine intervention and there's luck. I tell patients they want to take care of themselves so they will be around to benefit from future opportunities that may come along.

Q: What should patients expect once they are admitted to Shepherd Center?

A: Rehabilitation at Shepherd Center is hard work. We're not a spa. Our job is to push people to do things they think they cannot do. It's sort of like being a coach. We show patients the way to do things and then push them to do it. Our role is to make patients as independent as possible. The goal is to discharge them to their homes.

Q: Describe the interaction you have with patients and their families once they are admitted to Shepherd.

A: Patients see their attending physician at least once a day, and they see that same doctor during their entire stay. The consistency we provide in care is very important. When patients first arrive, they typically see their attending physician for 30 to 40 minutes a day. Plus, the physician reviews the patient's lab test results and discusses the patient in treatment team conferences. Also, physicians sometimes observe their patients in therapy to see the progress they're making. Toward the end of a patient's stay, the physician typically spends 15 to 20 minutes a day with them if all is going well.

Q: What have you learned about yourself and others in the process of treating people with catastrophic injuries?

A: I'm still amazed at times by the resiliency of certain people with certain kinds of injuries. I sometimes think nobody could cope with this certain injury and these certain circumstances, but then they do amazing things.... I see people at their absolute worst. Life has thrown them the worst imaginable circumstances, and we (the staff) can be a reminder of that. But most patients usually turn a corner, and then we're associated with their triumph on some level.

**INTERESTING FACTS
DR. BROCK BOWMAN, M.D.**



Photo by Gary Meek

Board Certification:
Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation; Spinal Cord Injury Medicine

Specialization:
Spinal Cord Injury (SCI); Dual Diagnosis of SCI and Acquired Brain Injury

Experience:
Joined Staff of Shepherd Center in 1998

Random Facts:

- Pitched in the 1989 College World Series, Division 3, for Johns Hopkins University
- First job was as construction laborer when he was in high school
- Father of 4-year-old twins

Physiatry Residency:
Baylor College of Medicine

Internship:
Georgia Baptist Medical Center

Medical School:
Duke University School of Medicine

Undergraduate Degree:
Johns Hopkins University