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# NORTH SHORE JOURNAL

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Christine Mallory, Editor

## North Shore Area Partners Opens Medical Equipment Loan Closet

By Kitty Mayo

North Shore Area Partners (NSAP) in Silver Bay has opened a "new" medical equipment loan program, one with a storied history.

The loan closet is a free public service for people needing personal care equipment such as canes, walkers, wheelchairs, commodes, and smaller pieces. Anyone can come in to see if the equipment they need is available, preferred to call ahead if possible. NSAP's hours are 8:30 am to 4:00 pm Monday through Thursday. Priority for equipment will go to older adults, in keeping with NSAP's mission.

Ed Maki, local history-keeper and past adjutant for Post 6204, has shared some of the loan closet's history. Maki says that the closet started in the early 1980's for any community member who needed it, but the idea was born from the reality that as VFW members were aging, they needed such equipment. Initially, a trailer was used to store equipment, then later it was moved to its most re-

cent home while still under the VFW's care to a shed behind the Silver Bay Arena.

VFW Post 6204 was established in Silver Bay in 1955 with 78 charter members, and was officially known as Allan MacDonald Post 6204. It celebrated its 50th anniversary at the Silver Bay Country Club in 2005 with 78 members attending. The Post disbanded in 2012 because of declining membership, but the use of the loan closet continued.

Now the medical equipment loan closet has moved to NSAP's building. Lise Abasz, NSAP director, calls the continuation of the loan closet "a true community effort", at the handing off of the responsibility to give back to the community.

NSAP had moved into the former Wells Fargo building in the shopping center in Silver Bay just before the pandemic. Just as renovation was being completed, a fire in an adjacent space caused fire damage to NSAP's space.

Despite progress being "complicated" by the pandemic, and fire damage necessitating starting renovations over again, they have finally moved into their new space and are open for visitors by appointment.

"We want it to be a hub of information for senior services at our end of the county," said Abasz.

In addition to office, meeting, and group programming space, the new facility had a room available to take over the medical equipment as fewer local vets were available to continue running it.

The new set up offers more space for organization and storage, improved accessibility, and a more convenient location in winter months. Items have been transferred, and inventoried for ease of checking out, and will be sanitized as they come in and before they go out.

Any donations to the loan closet are limited to smaller, useful

medical or assistive items. Large items such as hospital beds cannot be accepted. Abasz is hopeful that in the future they will be able to act as a resource for connecting adapted vehicles to those who need them.

"It is a wonderful service the VFW has been doing for years, and we hope to keep it going as a place that is convenient for our community and that it is well used," said Abasz.

Items can be checked out for use for an indefinite time period, and returned whenever they are no longer needed. Anyone can borrow an item to try out to see if it will work well for their circumstance before they make a purchase, or use it as long as needed.

"We are really excited to have the space to do something that fits into our bigger vision particularly for older adults, and hope it brings people into our building to see what other things we have to offer," said Abasz.

## Long-Covid Syndrome a Real Illness

By Kitty Mayo

The world-wide pandemic brought on by the Covid-19 virus has been devastating for some, challenging for just about everyone, and a cause for ongoing problems for more than just a few.

A relatively newly recognized syndrome: Long-Covid Syndrome, has been identified by the world's medical community, and even locally by doctors at Lake View Hospital and Clinics in Two Harbors and Silver Bay.

Long-Covid can negatively impact the quality of life of survivors, and limit their ability to do normal daily activities as mundane as house-keeping chores. It has been known to last for as long as six months, and some have endured symptoms for over a year and it is unknown if there is an end in sight for their suffering.

Dr. Tolga Hanhan, physician at Lake View Clinic in Two Harbors, says he has several patients at Lake View with long-covid symptoms, ranging from common (shortness of breath, fatigue, chest pain), to a less common chronic cough. Some other psychological complaints have also become fairly common, such as; brain fog, depression, and anxiety.

"There is this syndrome that we don't understand very well, some people are having shortness of breath doing even little things they never would have had before," said Hanhan.

Brain fog has been defined as having a poorer memory, and difficulty concentrating to the point for some that remembering just one and two-step directions, or functioning in their job has become a problem.

"This is a timely topic, because we talk about the deaths from Covid, but we don't always talk about the lasting effects that can come after a

Covid-19 infection," said Hanhan.

For now, treatment comes in the form of supportive therapy. That means treating the conditions such as anxiety and depression with standard therapeutic interventions. In the case of chest pains, patients are screened for cardiac issues, and if none are found treated for pain.

Another possibility for those with shortness of breath from long-Covid are breathing exercises used to help patients retrain their breathing patterns after battling inflammation in their lungs caused by the virus. Hanhan says that people who have had Covid-related pneumonia can feel better, but x rays can show that lung inflammation persists.

Diaphragmatic breathing, or deep breathing, aims at restoring diaphragm function and increasing lung capacity in coronavirus recovery, according to Johns Hopkins Medicine.

"There's increasing research that long-Covid changes breathing patterns more into the upper part of the chest instead of the normal pattern of upper (chest) and lower (belly), prescribed breathing patterns that let the belly expand seem to be helping," said Hanhan.

While many people have suffered with mental health related issues during the pandemic due to isolation, Dr. Hanhan says that the long-Covid effects of depression and anxiety are something altogether different.

"This is a distinct syndrome of anxiety or depression after someone has had a Covid-19 infection, a real change from before they were sick, and that is presumably a neurological effect from Covid," said Hanhan.

Hanhan says for some people suffering from

long-covid symptoms getting validation has been difficult.

"Sometimes people have felt like they aren't being believed that they are still sick related to a Covid-19 infection. It's important to let people know that this is a very real illness," said Hanhan.

With so much unknown about the virus, studies are just getting started to reveal some much needed answers, such as those looking at whether an unvaccinated person with long-Covid would recover better if they were vaccinated.

"Anecdotally there are some reports of people with long-Covid who then get the vaccine that has actually been curative, we wouldn't expect that and we don't know why the vaccine makes some people feel much better," said Hanhan, adding, "I would encourage anyone who is not vaccinated to get vaccinated. It is the best way to end this pandemic and get back to normal".

While some of the most common symptoms of long-covid are listed above, others are reporting a variety of problems like loss of taste or smell, fevers, sleep disorders, and some researchers believe it may trigger a post-Covid POTS response. POTS (postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome), entails increased heart rate and blood pressure upon standing.

A new study by FAIR Health is reporting that about a quarter of people who get the virus infection are having at least one lingering health problem at least 30 days after a positive Covid test. The study reviewed health care claims for about 2 million people, and found that people of all ages were affected, with slightly more

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