

Katie Johnson: Good morning and welcome to Apple a Day, Lake Region Healthcare's Health and Wellness segment, where we feature news and information you can use to live a healthier life. I am Katie Johnson, your host, and my guest today is Angie Conklin. She's the Director of the Rehabilitation Therapies at Lake Region Healthcare, and she's here to highlight some exciting moves and changes within this busy and important department and service for our community. Good morning, Angie.

Angie Conklin: Hi. Thanks for having me.

Katie Johnson: Well, thanks for joining me. Let's start out by telling our listeners just a little bit about you and your history. How did you land at Lake Region Healthcare and in the position that you're in today?

Angie Conklin: I started with Lake Region Healthcare about 10 years ago as one of their occupational therapists in the home health world, and just over time has led me to the director of therapy here. We're very fortunate in rural Minnesota to have multiple therapists that work for us, and we have a wonderful team, and that team atmosphere drew me in along with other people.

Katie Johnson: You do have a great team, a relatively large team. How many therapists do you have and what are the different types of therapy services that are offered in the department?

Angie Conklin: Yeah, we have 46 therapists between occupational, physical, and speech therapy, a little over half through our outpatient therapy services. So, in physical therapy we do everything from orthopedic, sports medicine, vestibular, concussion management, Parkinson's programs. We just have a wide variety with many, many certifications. Most of our PTs have graduated from schools around the area and they have their doctorate degrees. We have amazing longevity in our team. We have many therapists that have been here 30, even some 45 years. And we have a lot of new grads, too, so we're fortunate to grab them when they're young and train them right, and they love our team as much as we love them and we're able to keep them here which is great for our patients and our community.

Katie Johnson: You mentioned that we have speech, physical, and occupational therapy. And you've been located on the ground level of the hospital, right next to the elevator, kind of crammed into that little space, right, and with the exception of pediatric therapy that's kind of been scattered all over the place. But that's the exciting news we have to talk about today is some relocation and expansion. Can you tell us what's happening there?

Angie Conklin: Yes, as you just said, we've been in the same location for many years. And with the growth of our team, doubling in size over the last 10 years, we have outgrown our space. So, we are currently in the process of moving the occupational and speech therapy to the first floor of the hospital, and that will

allow physical therapy to spread out across the whole therapy department on the first floor. So right now we just have pediatric therapy that has moved up to the space where the acute rehab gym was, and we're using some of that space, the rooms, for private treatment rooms and the gym, and we've had just a wonderful response from the patients and the families and the staff. It has been repurposed for a wonderful purpose.

Katie Johnson: You're right, that space that was previously inpatient acute rehabilitation really was the ideal space already set up with a gym and bring those pediatric therapy patients into one centralized spot and allow your team to spread out. What does it mean to patients besides just having a little more breathing space not being crammed in there? Why is this important to patients, to the community, to people who need rehab services?

Angie Conklin: Well, it's important for a variety of reasons. One, we just have to have a great space for our team to do the ideal care that they wanna do in pediatric therapy. And we do a lot of sensory integration so we need space for the kids to learn to reorganize those brains, do some crashing and jumping and running. And so many of our kids today just sit still and their body hasn't learned to process some of those sensations of jumping and climbing trees and falling down and crashing and all the things that our brain needs to feel those sensations and to learn how to organize them in the brain. So we're very fortunate to have the space to do that now and to grow our program. We've now just added another occupational therapists and another speech therapist to our team. So we now have four speech therapists and four OTs and one PT working just pediatrics. So that has quadrupled since I've been here, so it's amazing.

Katie Johnson: It is, and I think that it's unfortunately been one of our better kept secrets really, the depth of pediatric therapy service offerings that we have. One example is the social skills courses that are being offered now. And there's a lot more than that too.

Angie Conklin: Yes. We expanded this summer with some help from some of our casual staff to help us. And we've started what we call the Social Butterflies group. And it's a group where we've just gotten a group of kids together where they might need to learn how to share or to just work together as a team or socialize. How do you greet someone appropriately? And so that has taken off like mad and has been so fun. And right now they're finishing up the summer programming, but we're hoping to do it again next summer. For example, one of their fun projects that they're doing is they're working together learning how to organize a lemonade stand. And they're gonna have a lemonade stand out on the corner by the hospital. So they've worked together to do this whole project and this will be their final group activity together.

Katie Johnson: What a great way to learn to work as a team. And I think I heard they were also gonna incorporate some giving into that with the money that they raise.

Angie Conklin: Yes, that is my understanding. I don't know exactly what their plan is for that, but they have come up with some great ideas this whole summer.

Katie Johnson: Now, we talked about the pediatric therapy being on first floor now, where acute rehab used to be. That's phase one. When will occupational therapy be moving up to that first floor space too, and what can our patients expect for kind of a timeframe for the rest of the moves?

Angie Conklin: Yeah, we're hoping the middle of October we will start that whole phase, that we will move occupational therapy and the remaining speech therapy. Right now we do have one outpatient speech therapy office up there, and the rest of the OT group will follow suit. So our hand therapy will be up there, and lymphedema. And we are just really excited for all of that. The driving program, we're gonna have more space to spread out. We're gonna have some more private rooms with just all the amenities that we were looking for.

Katie Johnson: Before we wrap up, one of the things that I was thinking about was misconceptions around speech, occupational, and physical therapy. Are there some common misperceptions that are things that you might wanna clear up when we have this time to talk with our listeners about myths there might be about therapy?

Angie Conklin: Sure. I know for a while now we had quite a wait to get in. And now we have been able to hire more staff and the space was an issue. But now we're able to get people in within the week. And so there isn't that issue any more. Another thing I hear out in the community is many times people feel that we're not as trained as other therapy departments that might market that their staff are doctorates of physical therapy. We also have that here. The majority of our physical therapy staff have their doctorates, and our OTs have their master's, and our speech have their master's. We have so much more training besides that, too. Most of our staff are ASTYM trained and they have lots of manual training and Parkinson's training. And we're always looking to be at the top of our game and provide the best care we can for our patients here at Lake Region.

Katie Johnson: And I know that most of the time a doctor's referral is required for your services. So, meeting the requirements that our doctors have sets the bar pretty high.

Angie Conklin: Yeah, definitely. And we are looking at some direct access here in the future, which will help some of our patients. That is something we're moving towards. We always wanna follow our state and national regulations for sure, but we also wanna do what's best for our patients.

Katie Johnson: Anything else that you wanna share with our listeners before we wrap up today?

Angie Conklin: No, just if you haven't been here before, come check us out. We have many, many things to offer with wonderful staff. And we're hoping to do an open house for our pediatric expansion here this fall or winter. And yeah, come and see us.

Katie Johnson: Well, definitely we'll make sure that we get the word out about the open house once the final moves are all complete. As I understand it, sleep studies are something else that are going to be expanding in that repurposed space, so we'll look forward to hearing more about that on future programs as well. But for now, exciting to hear that our pediatric therapy services are on the first floor of the hospital as some new expanded space. And all of our outpatient rehab therapies just getting to spread out and better serve our community. So, thank you and thank your team for all that you do to make the occupational, physical, and speech therapy services at Lake Region Healthcare so exceptional.

Angie Conklin: Thank you so much, Katie.

Katie Johnson: Angie Conklin, Director of Rehabilitation Therapies at Lake Region Healthcare, my guest today on Apple A Day. Angie and Katie both remind you there is so much to do here, stay healthy for it. Have a great day.