

Support offered for amputees at JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute

EDISON – More than 30 New Jerseyans living with amputations gathered on Feb. 26 to share the challenges and joys of life with an artificial limb.

They shared their common experiences at the “Ampuversary” to celebrate another year of the Amputee Support Group at Hackensack Meridian Health JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute.

Some of the amputees lost limbs to trauma, and others to medical issues such as cancer, vascular disease or infection.

“We all have a different story, but it’s great that we come together and share our challenges and realize we are not alone,” Chris Sickels, of Edison, who had one leg amputated as a child and another later in life because of illness, said in a prepared statement. “It’s such a happy group of people. We learn from each other and we also teach each other what we’ve learned about living with amputation.”

JFK Johnson offers a continuum of care that ranges from surgery to acute care to inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation. Artificial limbs created for each person’s individual needs are made at the JFK Johnson

(Continued on page 8)

Prosthetics and Orthotics Laboratory, also in Edison.

Dr. Heikki Uustal, medical director of the team, said people with artificial limbs learn from each other and provide insight that even professionals cannot offer.

“When my patients see me they see someone with two arms and legs,” Uustal said in the statement. “They may wonder, ‘Could he really relate to what I go through?’ That’s why we thought it was so important to create this community of education and support.”

The Amputee Support Groups meets monthly.

More than 4,000 people in New Jersey experience amputations each year, according to the latest data reported by the Amputee Coalition. The JFK Johnson Prosthetic and Orthotic Team schedules 3,000 to 4,000 patient visits each year, including hundreds of new referrals from around the Tri-State Area, according to the statement.

Nearly 2 million people live with an amputation in the United States, and approximately 185,000 amputations occur in the United States each year, according to the statement.

Members of the support group said they share laughter and joy — and even jokes about their artificial limbs. One wore a

T-shirt that said: It’s taking longer than I thought for my leg to grow back.

Jan Stubbs of Manchester, who needed an amputation following an infection, said, “Yes, I get jokes about my name from people who pay attention.

“Everybody in this group is so joyful. ... There is no time to sit around and say, ‘Why me?’ The prosthetic program is wonderful here; and this group makes us all see that there is life after amputation. We’re not in this alone,” she said.



PHOTO COURTESY OF RUSS DESANTIS PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEO

JFK Medical Center in Edison held its Ampuversary party for its Amputee Ability Group to celebrate the spirit of its amputee patients.

