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## New clinic aims to aid workers with injuries

By **LIZ HEITZMAN** of the Tribune's staff

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It was 2:30 a.m. Dec. 27, and Julie Hagedorn was working the night shift at University Hospital.

An experienced intensive care nurse, she was helping move a patient for whom she had been caring for weeks when she felt a terrible pain in her left hand.

"Pain shot through from my thumb all the way up into almost the elbow," she said. "The pain shot up, and I couldn't do anything after that."

Hagedorn and her supervisor documented the injury, and by daylight, Hagedorn was visiting physician John Hoerner at the Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Clinic at Rusk Rehabilitation Center, a joint venture between HealthSouth Corp. and the University of Missouri-Columbia.

But on a follow-up visit Monday, Hagedorn visited a new center: The Missouri Occupational Injury Center in southwest Columbia's Woodrail Centre.

The clinic, a part of University Hospital and Clinics, deals exclusively with work injuries. It opened last week.

"It seemed logical to separate the services out," said Monica Harris, the clinic's workers' compensation care coordinator. Rusk deals with all kinds of injuries, from sports-related sprains to people who fall and hurt themselves, she said.

Two doctors, Hoerner and Robert Conway, work at the clinic and assess various injuries from back pain to carpal tunnel syndrome.

The center competes with Boone Hospital Center's Occupational Medical Center, open since 1991 and located in the Broadway Medical Plaza 3.

Boone spokesman Lynn Hostetler said the county-owned hospital has contracts with several major employers in town and offers a range of services, such as employee physicals and ergonomic consultation.

"I'm sure it will be competition, but that's not necessarily a bad thing," he said.



Jenna Isaacson photo  
Physician John Hoerner, right, consults with Julie Hagedorn at The Missouri Occupational Injury Center.

**Sudoku Puzzles**

1	3	6					7
9	2	5	8		6	1	
2				1	2		
	1	2	6	5	3		
	6	3					1
	4	8					
2	7		4	9	8	3	
8				6		4	2

• [Play Sudoku Online](#)

In Missouri, a worker injured on the job doesn't have a choice about which doctor to visit; those decisions are made by employers and insurance providers. In addition to making decisions about the best care, doctors who see injured workers also are called to make decisions about when and if an injured employee can return to work.

Harris said it's a delicate balance between pleasing patients, employers and insurance adjusters.

"We're here to provide the patient the best care possible while also providing excellent customer service to employers and adjusters," she said. "Getting back to work is only part of the picture. Once they can perform duties at work, life just gets better in general."

The center does not employ its own physical therapists, but Harris said such a service could soon be added.

There are several businesses in Columbia that help injured workers get back to work, including Peak Performance and The Work Center.

Mike Frossard, program manager at The Work Center, said he often receives referrals from MU.

"The physicians staffing it are the same ones we deal with now," he said. "It's not a competitive threat so much as we complement each other's services."

Todd Werts, a local attorney who has experience in litigating workers' compensation cases, said his experience with Columbia doctors who deal with such cases has been mostly positive.

"I've generally found them to be receptive to patient complaints," Werts said. "But doctors in general tend to be conservative when it comes to assessing a worker's level of disability."

Hagedorn, who had a wrist sprain and tendon injuries, said the system worked well from her perspective. She got back to work this week, although she still is restricted in how much she can lift.

"I'm very pleased with the program," she said. "I'm just happy to be getting back to work. Everything went really smoothly."

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