

Uncertainty, determination and triumph: These are the components of hard-fought battles to overcome COVID-19. Recovering from the virus is equally taxing and essential.

This second phase requires the skill and expertise of healthcare heroes like speech language pathologist Kate Webler, occupational therapist Emily Sanders and physical therapist Kathryn Palano, part of a cadre of rehabilitation specialists at Shirley Ryan AbilityLab who are helping COVID-19 patients return to daily life.

The Shirley Ryan AbilityLab, in Chicago, opened a 24-bed COVID Care Unit in April to address the challenges of patients after severe cases and long hospitalizations:

- Trouble swallowing, talking and walking
- Blood clots that can lead to stroke
- Cognitive issues

"It's one thing to survive the infection, but what's next?" said healthcare hero Leslie Rydberg, MD, a Shirley Ryan AbilityLab attending physician.

Webler, Sanders and Palano each worked with patient Gordon Quinn, a documentarian best known for his work on Hoop Dreams. After a month-long hospital stay, Quinn stayed in the hospital's COVID Care Unit for two weeks in April.

Webler worked with him on exercises to stretch and relax his vocal cords to regain his voice. Sanders had him pick up small items then place them in a bag to mimic everyday activities, such as grocery shopping.

Palano helped Quinn practice climbing and descending stairs. To make his triumphant return home, Quinn would have to make it up six steps. On his last inpatient therapy day, Quinn offered a glimpse of how far he's come: He made it up stairs at the hospital all on his own.

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