

## **HealthSouth Awards AutoAmbulator Test Site To Rehabilitation Institute of St. Louis**

### **Testing With Spinal Cord and Stroke Patients Will Begin Soon**

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HealthSouth Corporation has selected The Rehabilitation Institute of St. Louis for initial feasibility studies on the AutoAmbulator, a potentially ground-breaking therapeutic robotic machine being developed by HealthSouth to rehabilitate individuals recovering from conditions affecting walking such as strokes and spinal cord injuries. The AutoAmbulator will be unveiled Tuesday, July 24 during the dedication of The Rehabilitation Institute, which is a partnership between HealthSouth and BJC HealthCare in affiliation with the Washington University School of Medicine.

The AutoAmbulator is designed to replicate the pattern of normal walking. HealthSouth developers believe it will be an important advance in the field of rehabilitative medicine. The study in St. Louis will help researchers gauge clinical theories that the device can actually increase blood flow in patients' legs, decrease muscle spasms, improve respiration and enhance neurological recovery.

"This promises to be a substantial advancement for the field of spinal cord injury and related neurological conditions associated with gait abnormalities," said renowned researcher John McDonald, MD, PhD, an assistant professor of neurology at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis who will lead the scientific and outcomes-based study at The Rehabilitation Institute of St. Louis. "It's very rewarding to see HealthSouth make such a major investment in developing new technologies and therapies such as the AutoAmbulator. The research potential is exciting."

HealthSouth CEO Richard M. Scrushy first envisioned the AutoAmbulator two years ago and then hired engineers and computer experts to design it and build a prototype. "It's great to see this dream becoming a reality," said Scrushy. "The very early stage anecdotal outcomes experienced by patients who have tried the device look very promising, so we are anxious to get this study under way at The Rehabilitation Institute of St. Louis."

Gary West, the HealthSouth-funded inventor, said the AutoAmbulator will allow patients to "walk" while their upper body is supported by an overhead harness system and their legs secured to rotating robotic arms.

The physiological responses of individuals participating in the trials of the AutoAmbulator will be monitored by a computer touch-screen built into the device's 5-foot-tall steel and aluminum frame, said West. The computer monitors the patient's vital signs, weight and walking speed. Special built-in sensors and an emergency button can stop the device in the event a medical problem arises.

Doug Heir, a five-time Paralympic athlete, will demonstrate the AutoAmbulator at the dedication. He was paralyzed from the chest down 23 years ago when he broke his neck attempting to rescue a swimmer. He has participated in the early testing of the AutoAmbulator, testing more than 20 times and walking up to 90 minutes at a time.

"This device has the potential to change the approach to neurological disorders in rehabilitative medicine," said Heir, a Cherry Hill, N.J., attorney who is president of the National Spinal Cord Injury Association. "I get a lot of e-mails from patients who have lost hope. I tell them, 'Just wait. There's new technologies and therapies being developed that will allow you to undergo simulated walking.' For them, the AutoAmbulator could be a life-enhancing blessing."

HealthSouth, the nation's largest provider of outpatient surgery, diagnostic imaging and rehabilitative healthcare services, operates more than 1,900 facilities in all 50 states, the United Kingdom, Puerto Rico, Australia and Canada.

HealthSouth can be found on the Web at <http://www.healthsouth.com/> and The Rehabilitation Institute of St. Louis can be found at <http://www.rehabilitationinstitute.com/>.

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For more information, please contact HealthSouth's Kristi Gilmore at 205-612-4750.

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