Carolinas Rehabilitation’s Newest Musculoskeletal Practice Thriving on Randolph Road
Carolinas Rehabilitation’s newest musculoskeletal practice on Randolph Road is less than a year old and already has garnered regional and national honors.

The outpatient office’s two physicians, Sonya Rissmiller, M.D., and Puneet Aggarwal, M.D., were recognized recently by Charlotte magazine as two of the region’s top doctors, despite being in practice in Charlotte a relatively short time.

Dr. Rissmiller, who is acting medical director of Carolinas Rehabilitation musculoskeletal clinic on Randolph Road, also coordinates a biannual prosthetic seminar. Her special interests include musculoskeletal and orthopedic problems, as well as amputee rehabilitation, prescriptive exercise for the elderly and the management of fibromyalgia and myofascial pain. Dr. Aggarwal, one of the region’s few physicians to be board certified in interventional pain management, has primary interests in interventional spine care and musculoskeletal and sports medicine, as well as electromyography (EMG/NCS).

Carolinas Rehabilitation has the largest

**TEAM APPROACH MEANS COORDINATED CARE**

The rehabilitation process requires that physicians and rehabilitation professionals work together to provide a comprehensive rehabilitation program. The musculoskeletal clinic on Randolph Road shares an office space with physical therapy, and Drs. Rissmiller and Aggarwal work closely with the therapists. The connection between physicians and therapists is very obvious to patients and results in the closely coordinated care they receive here.

The facility earned a top performer award for patient satisfaction in an annual survey conducted by Professional Research Consultants (PRC), a national health care market research company. PRC polls consumers across the country about their recent experiences as patients, providing a direct measure of customer service for the facility among its peers nationwide. The award places the Carolinas Rehabilitation facility at or above the 100th percentile for overall quality of care for the services measured.

“The physicians and therapists here do an outstanding job of coordination,” says Elizabeth Polo, Assistant Vice President of Carolinas Rehabilitation. “And the patients appreciate being able to receive therapy at the same location. In this way, we offer a ‘one-stop shop’ here.”

Professionals who work closely together understand each other’s services well. “In this practice, we can get immediate answers to our questions,” says Dr. Rissmiller. “If I want to know something about the physical therapy for a particular client, I can just step across the hall. I have a lot of confidence in therapists our patients are seeing. It’s a great advantage to be working as part of a team of professionals.”

Carolinas Rehabilitation has the largest
network of therapists dedicated to rehabilitation in the region. Many of Carolinas’ physicians and therapists are also certified in orthopaedics, spine, neurology, sports medicine, aquatics, hand therapy, pediatrics and women’s health. Having such a team of professionals enables them to treat patients with complex problems.

**TYPES OF CONDITIONS PHYSIATRISTS TREAT**

Both Dr. Rissmiller and Dr. Aggarwal are physiatrists, physicians who specialize in nonsurgical physical medicine and rehabilitation for patients who have been disabled as a result of a disease, disorder or injury. Dr. Aggarwal is an intervention spine physiatrist, while Dr. Rissmiller is a general musculoskeletal physiatrist. They diagnose and treat injuries and conditions, and direct the treatment team using nonsurgical methods. Physiatrists treat acute and chronic pain and musculoskeletal disorders. They may see a person who lifts a heavy object at work and experiences back pain, a basketball player who needs rehabilitation after a sprain or a knitter who has carpal tunnel syndrome. Physiatrists’ patients include people with arthritis, tendonitis, any kind of back pain and work- or sports-related injuries.

Physiatrists also treat serious disorders of the musculoskeletal system. They would treat a baby with a birth defect, someone in a bad car accident or an elderly person with a broken hip. Physiatrists coordinate the long-term rehabilitation process for patients with spinal cord injuries, cancer, stroke or other neurological disorders, brain injuries, amputations and multiple sclerosis.

Four out of five Americans experience low back pain, and it is the second most common reason that people see their family physician. Causes range from sport or work injuries to arthritis and other degenerative conditions. Since less than 5% will require surgery, nonsurgical therapeutics are a mainstay in management. Drs. Rissmiller and Aggarwal treat patients using conservative management techniques such as specific therapy prescriptions, medications and injections.

As an interventional physiatrist, Dr. Aggarwal utilizes a range of diagnostic and treatment services for musculoskeletal disorders. He uses technologically advanced methods to treat and diagnose patients, such as epidural injections, discography, joint injections and electromyography. He also performs nerve block procedures, lumbar intradiscal procedures, sympathetic blocks, facet joint blocks, various joint injections and other procedures.
TRAINING PHYSICIANS
OF THE FUTURE

Since the early 1990s, Carolinas Rehabilitation has participated in an academic and teaching program, offering residencies in physical medicine and rehabilitation. Since that time, the program has become a premier residency-training program and has received the maximum number of years of allowable accreditation for the last two accreditation cycles. The 10 current residents hail from medical schools around the nation. They do three years of training rotations under Carolinas’ physicians, using state-of-the-art equipment in the facilities.

Both Dr. Rissmiller and Dr. Aggarwal are actively involved in resident training and have presented lectures on musculoskeletal medicine. Dr. Aggarwal guides residents in spine care and is working on a board review book for the subspecialty. Dr. Rissmiller, who has been on the faculty for eight years, is course director of the prosthetics seminar and has also made presentations of fibromyalgia. Through the experience obtained within the residency programs, many of the residents have chosen to subspecialize in musculoskeletal and pain medicine and further their education via fellowships locally and nationally.

PLANNING FOR GROWTH

Carolinas Rehabilitation foresees only growth in the future as the population ages, continues their active lifestyle and develops arthritis, back injuries and other musculoskeletal problems. The Randolph Road office will be adding more physicians over the next five years to accommodate these active older adults and others with mobility-related issues. Overall, Carolinas Rehabilitation sees and handles more than 100,000 outpatient visits annually, both on a physician-referral and self-referral basis.

THE PHYSICIANS

Both Dr. Rissmiller and Dr. Aggarwal grew up in the metropolitan area of northern Virginia and decided upon a medical career at any early age. Both received a medical degree from the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond.

Dr. Rissmiller completed her residency at the Carolina Medical Center and is a member of the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, the Physiatric Association of Spine, Sports and Occupational Rehabilitation and the American College of Sports Medicine.

She was the youngest graduate from the Richmond Medical College of Virginia in 1994 and was voted “most athletic” graduate of her class. She runs, lifts weights (and has won competitions as a teen) and enjoys other fitness activities. She is married with two small children.

Dr. Aggarwal completed his internship in internal medicine at the University of Virginia – Roanoke and his residency in physical medicine and rehabilitation at Baylor College of Medicine. Later, he completed an interventional spine fellowship at Medical College of Virginia Hospital and the Sheltering Arms Spine and Sport Center. He is board certified in physical medicine and rehabilitation and pain medicine. Associations in which Dr. Aggarwal is active include the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Physiatric Association of Spine, Sport and Occupational Rehabilitation, North American Spine Society, International Spinal Injection Society and the American Society of Interventional Pain Physicians.

Dr. Aggarwal is an avid sports fan who was drawn to sports medicine and sports rehabilitation. He enjoys playing racquetball, tennis and ultimate Frisbee, as well as swimming, jogging and reading. He is married and lives in the Charlotte area.

MUSCULOSKELETAL CLINIC PART
OF CAROLINAS REHABILITATION

The musculoskeletal clinic on Randolph Road is part of Carolinas Rehabilitation, which consists of inpatient rehabilitation, outpatient rehabilitation, skilled nursing and home health therapy services. Although the Randolph Road clinic treats adults over age 15, Carolinas Rehabilitation cares for individuals for all ages, disabled by spinal cord injury, brain injury, stroke, cancer and other traumatic and nontraumatic injuries, and diseases. Carolinas Rehabilitation’s inpatient facility includes a total of 172 licensed beds; the main facility is one of the largest not-for-profit freestanding rehabilitation facilities of its kind in the United States. ■