

# Move over, bingo

## Nursing home residents use Wii for therapy, fun

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Lisa Gajewski (rear left), Facility Rehabilitation Coordinator, and Sara Conrad (rear right), Occupational Therapist, work with Morningside residents Caroline Ribbens, 79 (from left), and Viola Klein, 89, during a therapy session that incorporates the Wii gaming system.

**Sheboygan** - Cleo Damrow knows a little bit about how Ben Sheets must sometimes feel.

The 72-year-old throws a lot of fastballs and strikes out her opponents, but in a recent game, she couldn't get any run support and lost the contest.

The difference is that Damrow wasn't at Miller Park. Instead, she was playing from her wheelchair, pitching and swinging in front of a large, flat-screen television in the activities room of Morningside Health Center in Sheboygan, where she's been living since March while rehabilitating from a recent illness.

Morningside is one of several long-term care facilities in Wisconsin using Nintendo's Wii video gaming system as a way to supplement therapy and add physical and social activities for residents, turning an activity room into league night at the local bowling alley.

Other nursing homes that haven't started using the Wii are looking to get in on the action. The Wisconsin Health Care Association gave away a Wii system at its recent convention, and because the units can sometimes be hard to find in stores, other centers can't get their hands on them.

"It just ain't bingo anymore," said Tom Moore, executive director of the Wisconsin Health Care Association, which represents about 190 nursing homes. The popular interactive video games could become a centerpiece for activities at nursing facilities across the state, he said.

Damrow is going to visit her grandchildren soon and hopes they have a Wii so she can challenge them to a game. And what will they say when she does? "Oh, Grandma, you beat me!" she said.

Lisa Gajewski, facility rehabilitation coordinator at Morningside, said it's too early to track the therapeutic benefits from using the Wii.

Residents were skeptical of the video games at first, she said, but they've enjoyed playing while working on their balance and range of motion. Those who need a wheelchair can work up to standing for a few minutes to play.

"They're just more engaged in their activity and then they're willing to try more, they're willing to stay for a session longer," Gajewski said. "If it's something that's entertaining, it holds their interest and they're much more motivated to engage in the activity and continue with their therapy."

## Youthful instruction

Before Damrow was mowing down batters, 92-year-old Charlene Stuart was taking out bowling pins, first from a chair and then while standing in the middle of the activity room. Cheers from the staff and local students helping with the game drowned out the sound of Stuart's ball taking out pins.

Lilly Scheibel, a seventh-grader at nearby Urban Middle School, gently offered suggestions to Stuart as she swung her arm back to front, mimicking the motion of sending a ball down a lane.

"Hold it down," Scheibel said to Stuart, demonstrating how to use the buttons on the Wii controller to hold the ball before releasing it.

Scheibel is part of a group of students who visit Morningside once a month to teach residents how to use the games.

The health center sticks with easier ones such as baseball and bowling, which don't require many technical skills or much button-pushing.

"They're a lot of fun to hang out with, they're really funny," Scheibel said of the residents. "They have a lot of fun, and it's a great way to feel involved."

Stuart was a bowler years ago, and having grown up with six brothers, she called herself a sports nut. She got her share of physical activity back then and still enjoys getting out of her room to play on the Wii.

"At my age, you can be holed up someplace, but not me. You have the spirit and the motions," she said of the games, adding that the sounds make her wish she was really at the bowling alley or a baseball game.

Raeline Springstroh, Morningside's administrator, said the Wii keeps residents connected with modern technology and learning new things.

"You feel like you're part of the world. It really meets all of their psycho-social needs," Springstroh said of the Wii games. "We want (the nursing home) to be a place to live."



Charlene Stuart, 92, tries her hand recently at the Wii version of baseball at Morningside Health Center in Sheboygan. Though she hasn't played the sport in over 50 years, the video game allows her to swing the bat and run the bases electronically.