



On the Road Again and ‘In the Tank’

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Jackie Womack, right, with Tonya Ballard, hyperbaric tech/safety director in Alton Memorial Hospital’s Center for Wound Care and Hyperbaric Medicine. Jackie traveled all the way from Arnold, Mo., each day for approximately a month for the hyperbaric oxygen chamber treatment at AMH.

Woman Travels 50 Miles One Way Each Day Just for Wound Treatment at AMH

ALTON, IL -- Even with the high price of gasoline these days, Jackie Womack was willing to pay the price for excellent treatment at Alton Memorial Hospital.

Womack is a resident of Arnold, Mo. – approximately 50 miles south of Alton on Interstate 55 in far South St. Louis County. But that didn’t bother her one bit when she realized that hyperbaric oxygen therapy was what she needed to treat a diabetic foot ulcer.

“I had read about Alton Memorial’s Wound Care Center and their excellent wound care and hyperbaric oxygen therapy in *BJC Today*,” says Womack, herself a BJC employee with Sunset Hills (Mo.) Dermatology. “When you see a place that good, that’s where you want to go. The drive doesn’t bother me. It’s all about getting the best treatment and getting better.”

And Jackie wasn’t disappointed one bit by her experience at AMH with Tonya Ballard, the certified hyperbaric technician/medical assistant who helped her for several hours each day over the course of 20 treatments.

“Of course, that makes us feel good that someone would seek us out from so far away for their treatment,” says Patti Kain, clinical coordinator for the Wound Care Center. “It’s a tribute to Tonya and our entire staff. There are other hospitals closer to Jackie’s home that she could have visited. We were happy to make it worth her while.”

Kain noted that Alton’s Center for Wound Care was honored with the Diversified Clinical Services Robert A. Warriner Award for Quality, a national award that recognizes centers in the Diversified network that achieve several quality benchmarks for 24 consecutive months.

During hyperbaric oxygen therapy, patients are put in a pressurized chamber of 100 percent oxygen. The therapy quickly delivers high concentrations of oxygen to the bloodstream, assists in the healing process of wounds and is effective in fighting certain types of infections. It also stimulates the growth of new blood vessels and improves circulation.

Treatment typically lasts two hours a day for five days a week, and could last for four to 12 weeks, depending on the wound type.

“It’s equivalent to being 33 to 49.5 feet below sea level when you’re in there,” Ballard says. “It’s a very controlled environment, but we can communicate with them. They can also watch TV or bring a DVD or CD with them, or they can just sleep. It’s all worth it when a patient can have a wound healed that they might have had for years. It’s very rewarding to help someone like that.”

Womack’s wound developed into a bone infection that required the treatment. She first came to the Wound Care Center on Aug. 1, initiated hyperbaric oxygen therapy on Oct. 13 and her wound was officially healed on Nov. 14.

“My husband, John, drove me up here each day,” Womack says. “He didn’t want to be in the room while I had the treatment, but he went around the hospital and got to know a lot of the employees. It takes 90 minutes for us to make the trip one way and I’m usually here about three hours. So it took up a pretty good portion of the day, but it was well worth it.”

For more information about Alton Memorial Hospital’s Center for Wound Care and Hyperbaric Medicine, call 618-433-7066.