

Polio Rehabilitation:

Rehabilitation usually starts after the acute, contagious stage. There are two main areas of rehabilitation; prevention of contractures and increase in strength. The goal in both areas is to regain and maintain the highest level of function possible.

If the polio patient has seriously impaired pulmonary function they may be in an “iron lung”. This does not prevent rehabilitation. Access to the patient is possible through the “port holes” on the sides of the iron lung, and the iron lung can also be opened from the front. See photographs: iron lung 1, iron lung 2, and iron lung 3.

In the photograph “iron lung 3” please note the cylindrical container being accessed by the nurse. This is a hot pack machine. Hot packs are wool blankets that are heated and wrapped around the patient’s arms, legs, and sometimes the torso, prior to physical therapy. The hot pack machine heats the blankets in boiling water and then spins them dry. See photograph “hot pack machine”. Before the invention of this specialized machine the hot packs were heated in large metal pails and then dried using a washing machine wringer. See photograph: “hot packs”. Hot packs are used prior to therapy to relax muscles that have tightened from disuse.

Note: There is no visible reason for the nurses in this photograph to be wearing masks. At this stage polio is no longer contagious.

Patients who are able can go to specialized gymnasiums, or exercise rooms. Stretching and exercise programs are tailored to each patient’s individual needs. Sometimes the program will include water therapy. Warm water provides buoyancy and helps to relax tightened muscles. See photographs: gymnasium, PT, and water therapy 1, 2, and 3.

Patients with sufficient strength will begin to walk again, often with the aid of braces, crutches, or other supportive devices. See photographs: walking 1, 2, 3, and 4. If the patient has been in bed for several weeks before beginning to stand upright again, they might need to get accustomed to being upright. A device known as a standing board is used to make this adjustment gradually. See the person in back of the room, toward the right of center, in the gymnasium photograph.

Another aspect of rehabilitation is Occupational Therapy. The goal of the Occupational Therapist is to teach the patient how to accomplish daily living tasks despite weakened muscles. The young patient in photograph “OT” is learning to pick up objects with his left hand and transfer them to a seriously weakened right hand.

In all of rehabilitation there is a psychological element. If the patient is encouraged and supported, then the rehabilitation process will be enhanced. The photograph “Santa” shows a very young patient being visited by Santa. A person this young probably has little understanding of his illness or what is happening to him. He knows only that he can’t run and play like before, and that people are doing things to him that often hurt. But, if he is visited by someone like Santa, he might feel less alone and afraid.



Photographs in the left column:

Iron lung 1

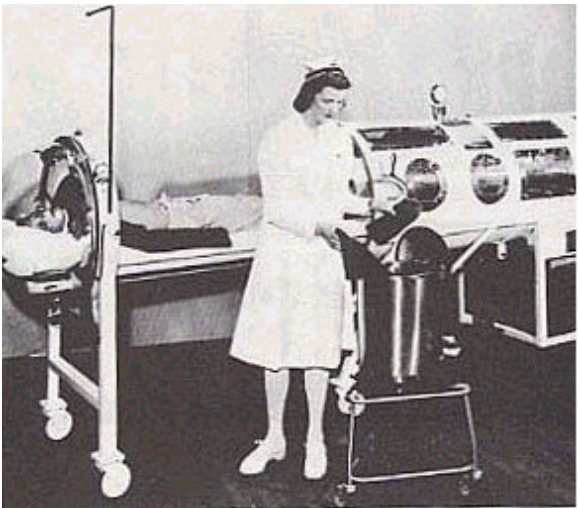
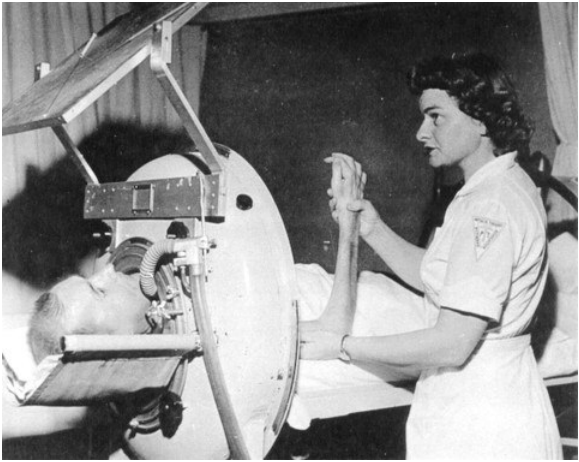
Iron lung 2

Iron lung 3

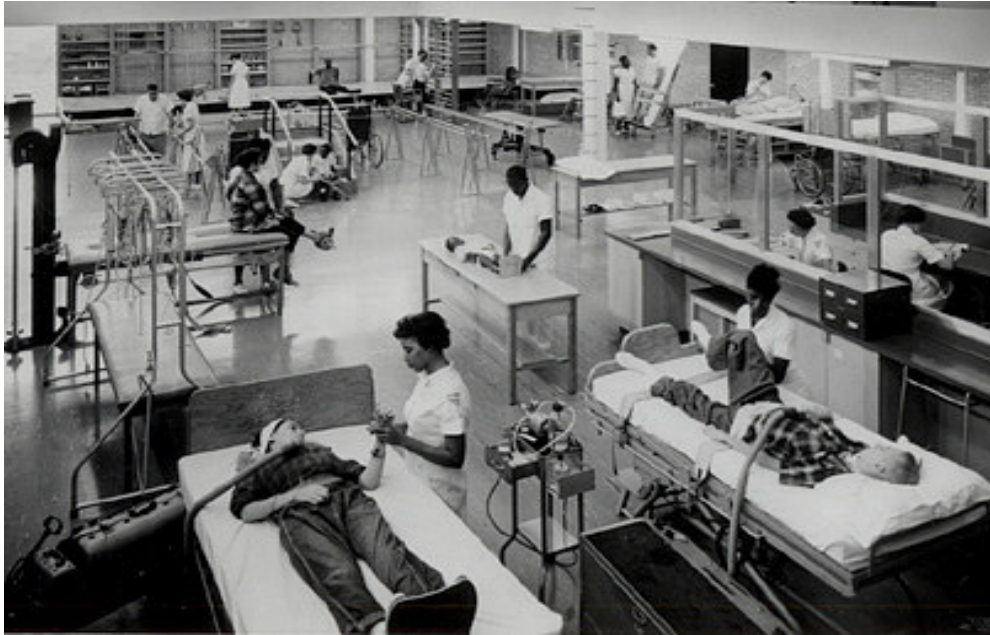
Photographs below:

Hot pack machine

Hot packs



Photographs continued on next page



Photograph above: gymnasium

Photograph at left: PT (physical therapy)

Photographs below: water therapy 1, 2, & 3



Photographs continued on next page



Photographs on this page: walking 1, 2, 3, & 4



Photographs continued on next page



Photograph above: OT (occupational therapy)

Photograph below: Santa

