

UpScale brings dignity to patients

JANET PEREZ | Special to Jewish News | Posted: Wednesday, February 1, 2017 11:32 am

We know that people with mobility challenges, whether temporary or permanent, often face many physical obstacles, but many of us would be surprised to know that those obstacles can be found in doctors' offices, health care centers and hospitals.

As a longtime accessibility consultant, Halle Farber had observed a common problem: patients with mobility challenges had to be awkwardly helped onto high examination tables or be examined while in their wheelchairs. Farber knew there had to be some relatively inexpensive way to not only help patients, but also doctors who face non-compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Today, Farber is chief executive officer and co-owner of the Scottsdale-based company Medical Accessibility, which has recently started selling its first product, the UpScale, an examination table that is height-adjustable and comes with a built-in weight scale, a built-in tape measure, removable grab bars and accessible stirrups for a complete exam. The table retails at around \$5,000 and medical-care providers could qualify for a tax credit of up to 50 percent of the price. The Upscale is universally designed to serve able-bodied patients as well.

"Our table also goes one inch lower than other tables on the market, and for some people in wheelchairs, that one inch makes a tremendous difference," she said. "The lower height is easier on both the patient and the staff during the transfer from wheelchair to exam table."

While the general public may not realize that exam tables have to be ADA compliant, Farber said the number of lawsuits against health-care providers has been on the increase over the past two years.

"We're hopeful that when physicians realize this is a requirement they will do the right thing, but it often comes down to dollars and cents," she said. "We feel our table is affordable."

About seven years ago, Farber, who has a degree in design and environmental analysis from Cornell University's College of Human Ecology, began designing what would become the Upscale. Before hitting the market, the Upscale was involved in studies measuring patient and staff satisfaction at two community health centers in Phoenix, Native Health and Adelante.

"Our clinic has used the UpScale for exams on hundreds of patients of all abilities," said Dr. Diane Weissman, acting medical director at Native Health. "It is easy to use and it has made a dramatic



Medical Accessibility introduces UpScale

Halle Farber, left, and Virginie Polster, co-owners of Medical Accessibility, recently started selling their company's first product, the UpScale, a height-adjustable examination table with special features.

difference in the exam experience for patients and staff.”

After being part of the satisfaction study, Farber said Adelante purchased an UpScale – Medical Accessibility’s first sale.

“They were looking to use the table in its lowest position with the back raised, much like a chair, in what they call a ‘talking room’ (a hybrid exam room and consultation room),” Farber said. “The feedback was so positive that they’re considering a room redesign to be able to use more of the UpScale’s features in different configurations.”

Medical Accessibility is selling the UpScale through distributors and is working on another version of its table. The original UpScale can hold a maximum weight of 450 pounds. The new product is being designed to hold up to 650 pounds.

For the team at Medical Accessibility, which includes co-owner Virginie Polster and Farber’s husband, Paul Farber, helping physicians make their exam rooms ADA- compliant is only half of the company’s mission. The other half is to help people with mobility issues maintain their dignity while receiving basic medical care.

“As for patient response, it’s really been tremendous, and it gives us such a warm feeling to know the good that the UpScale is doing in the community,” Farber said. “We were told that one local patient (a double amputee) had tears in her eyes when she told her physician how grateful she was to have her weight measured. She honestly couldn’t remember the last time anyone had been able to take her weight.”