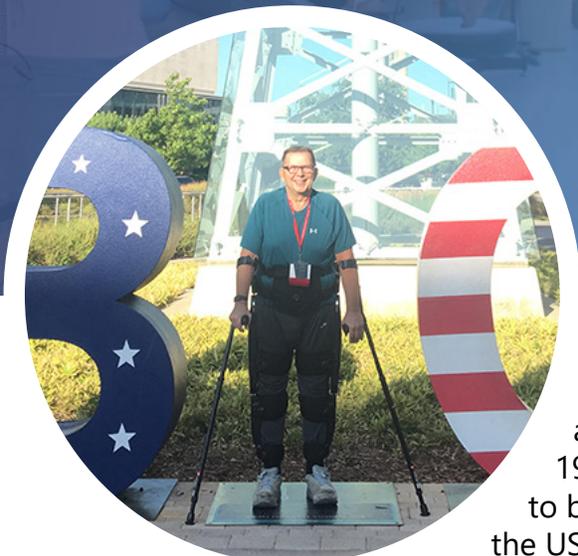




Jim's Story



A Disease Won't Stop Him From Walking

My name is Jim Dahlin. I'm an army veteran having served as a combat medic with the 4th infantry division in Vietnam from 1969-70. I was discharged June 1971 and went on with the GI bill to become a nurse anesthetist. When I was 48 I rode a bicycle across the US from Seattle to Williamsburg, VA in 24 days averaging 140 miles a day. Two short years later, at the age of 50, I was unable to even get on a bicycle. I had been diagnosed with a disease called hereditary spastic paraparesis which eventually put me in a wheelchair.

The Minneapolis VA and my introduction to exoskeletons

I didn't get involved with the VA until 2014 when I was to have an MRI done at the Minneapolis VA. I needed to have my baclofen pump checked before I could be discharged and had to go to the SCID (spinal cord injury or disease) center. Meeting with the physician there, she told me that my disease qualified me to be seen and treated at the SCID center. As part of my two-day physical I was seen by a physical therapist. She asked me if I would be willing to try a new therapy device that she was given responsibility for. This new therapy device was an exoskeleton called the Ekso. I attended physical therapy three days a week for five weeks. It was so nice to stand and move. Unfortunately, the Ekso was only for therapy and not for home use.

A few weeks passed when I got a call from another therapist in the SCID who was looking for people to try the ReWalk exoskeleton, which was approved for home use. I went through training for three weeks to learn how to use the device. Since you need to have someone with you using the exoskeleton, my wife went through some of the training with me.

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After completing my training, I was approved to take it home for a three-month trial. After my trial period had ended, I returned the device and was asked if I wanted to have it purchased for me by the VA. I had found out that another device was going to be available for trial in the next few months, so I made the decision to trial the new exoskeleton before I would make any decision.

Why I chose Indego

When the Indego exoskeleton became available for trial, my wife and I went and completed the training for it at the Minneapolis VA. I was then given the opportunity to take the Indego home for a three-month trial. During my trial period, Indego made some changes to the exoskeleton. They sent me the new components with each change so my trial period was extended to give me the opportunity to test all the new components.

I made the decision to go with Indego for a few reasons. I can make adjustments to such things as step height and step length while walking in the device. Its five-piece design makes it easy to assemble and put on, and if I spend some time away from my home, it has a travel case to place it in.

“The thing I love most about an exoskeleton is the ability to stand and walk and look someone straight in the face while talking.”

The thing I love most about an exoskeleton is the ability to stand and walk and look someone straight in the face while talking. Those of us in chairs know how tiring it can be on our necks looking up at someone standing and carrying on a long conversation. It’s good for the overall body just to stand and move. I generally walk in the device for 30-45 minutes 2-3 times a week. Living in Minnesota, the winter poses some problems when it gets too cold or the sidewalks become slippery from ice and snow. Because Indego is slim and lightweight, I can get in my car while wearing the device, giving me the option to go to a mall or large store and walk with it during the winter months.

If you are currently in a chair you should talk to your physical therapist in your SCID to see if you physically qualify for the use of an exoskeleton. If you do qualify, I highly encourage you to do a trial with your therapist. I know that not every SCID has Indego in house. If yours does not, you should contact Indego at 217-343-7506 to set up a screening.

