

# Sister Kenny begins R&D effort

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STAFF WRITER

The Sister Kenny Rehabilitation Institute has been a place where med-tech manufacturers have tried out cutting-edge rehabilitation devices. Now the institute wants to reap the economic benefits of conducting its own research and development.

The institute, an arm of Allina Hospitals & Clinics that provides rehabilitative services at five Minnesota hospitals, opened a research center in 2007 after raising \$2.8 million for the effort. Last November, it completed a \$1 million renovation that added lab and office space next to Sister Kenny's inpatient-care unit at Abbott Northwestern Hospital in Minneapolis.

The concept seeks to build a path to market for devices developed by Sister Kenny's clinicians. With the added resources, new technology could be developed in-house, then licensed to other med-tech companies or spun out into new startups.

Before, there was really no support network for a clinician with an idea, said Lars Oddsson, director of the Sister Kenny Research Center.

"If things like this become commercialized, there are millions of dollars in this for stakeholders who become involved," Oddsson said. A device could be marketed within five years, he said.

The research center will maintain Sister Kenny's focus on rehabilitative devices; one of Oddsson's prototypes includes an insole-like product that helps patients with balancing problems.

Institute officials believed Sister Kenny would increase its quality of care by getting more involved in research and development, said Bob Paulson, chairman of the Sister Kenny Foundation's board and president and CEO of Shoreview-based NxThera Inc.

## SISTER KENNY RESEARCH CENTER

Location: **Abbott Northwestern  
Hospital in Minneapolis**

Director: **Lars Oddsson**

Annual budget: **About \$500,000**

Full-time staff: **3**

Clinicians in research faculty: **38**

Founded: **2007**

Web: **allina.com/ahs/ski.nsf/page/  
resctr**

"The two absolute priority things are improving patient care, improving clinical outcomes. And the economic benefits from that will benefit not only Allina, but have the potential to have a greater benefit on the rehabilitative health care system in general," Paulson said.

Oddsson ran an injury analysis and prevention lab at Boston University for 14 years before coming to Sister Kenny in 2007. Since then, he's assembled a group of 38 Sister Kenny clinicians interested in research, brought in graduate-level engineering students from the Product Innovation Engineering Program of Sweden, and networked with med-tech executives around the Twin Cities.

"Lars is phenomenal. He's at the U a lot. He comes to conferences. He's developing relationships with Northern Europe. With that kind of leadership, this will be a great result," said Arthur Erdman, director of the University of Minnesota's Medical Devices Center.

Another University of Minnesota mechanical engineering professor, William Durfee, has been collaborating with Sister Kenny on research projects for a decade.

"What is great is now we do it more as peers," Durfee said.

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**Lars Oddsson, director of the Sister Kenny Research Center, with a prototype device to help patients with balance problems.**