

"You go from being in this numb state of not knowing your feelings to being under a microscope," Carol says. At times she felt emotionally wrung out-- especially after psychodrama, a form of guided role playing. "You go to really hard, scary [emotional] places," she says. And then patients have to go home to the demands of family or the silence of an empty apartment.

Since returning home every day presents problems of its own, a lack of support for instance, Strong has family night once a week. Patients there have a safe place to share their feelings with loved ones, without fear of ridicule or dismissal.

To round out the intense program of introspection and interaction, Strong gives patients a chance to step back from their problems for a portion of the day. Art therapy, food preparation (during therapeutic lunchtime), nutrition and health group, field trips to the supermarket and body-image discussions provide information and coping skills patients use when they leave the program.

It's hard to comment on the probable success rate of Strong's fledgling program. Barnett says, "we don't expect a healed group, people don't leave here after eight or nine weeks all better. It took them most of their lives to get here, and it may possibly take . . . several years to completely resolve their eating disorders. We give them a lot of tools to start that and when they leave here [many] of their behaviors are changed."

Carol seems to be living proof that change is possible even for someone struggling with weight for all her adult life. "I don't need to have cake anymore," she says, "but if I want it, I'll allow myself to have a sensible piece, and I decide what's sensible."

Beyond the remarkable turnaround in her eating habits, Carol's experience in the hospital's caring, affirming environment has given her a healthy dose of self-esteem and a