

focus on

Serious Injury Care

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Positive attitude key to recovery beyond the accident

A serious injury is a life-altering, potentially devastating event. Recovery may take months or years, and the person may never be quite the same as he or she was before the trauma. Brain injuries, for example, can cause lingering effects such as impaired memory, slower thinking, difficulty concentrating, sleep disturbances, and problems with using and understanding language.

Families are also thrown into turmoil. Not only is the situation emotionally charged, but the injured person may require around-the-clock care and support. This is followed by rehabilitation therapy to encourage the body to heal and help the person re-learn skills and activities, as well as cope with the avalanche of emotions.

“There is a psychological adjustment that one goes through following a catastrophic injury,” says Brenda Hunter, Serious Injury Program Manager with Bayshore Home Health. “Different people accept change at different speeds. Attitudes and feelings may fluctuate... A client who has had the support and time to work through some of the psychological adjustments and has developed a positive attitude toward rehabilitation will no doubt be more motivated and possibly improve his/her outcomes.”

Although the journey may be fraught with challenges, many people go on to have a rich, fulfilling life with the help of rehabilitation therapy. Some even tackle and achieve tasks that are difficult for anyone, let alone someone who has survived a catastrophic injury.

Bhawani Prashad of Woodbridge, Ont. is an example of someone who is battling back against the odds. He acquired a brain injury and other physical injuries in a motor vehicle accident in 2000. A respected community leader (he was a Hindu priest) and businessman, Prashad was suddenly unable to speak, write or remember his family’s names. He spent half a year in the hospital before he returned home.

After years of rehabilitation therapy, Prashad has improved, but still requires a lot of support from his family. “It’s a lot – we’re still taking care of him,” says Prashad’s wife of 49 years, Kussila. “Our two children who live at home help me a lot with him. They take him to appointments or, if he’s not well, they sit with him. It’s an ongoing situation – you always have to be there for him. He cannot stay by himself.”

The family had to adjust to not having Prashad as the head of their household, as well as having rehabilitation professionals visiting twice a week for the first few years. (Now, they visit every two weeks.)

Marion Feldman, a rehab teacher and coach with NeuroRehab, has worked with Prashad for several years. Therapeutic goals include reintegrating him into the community, so she takes him on outings. Prashad re-learned how to use money, buy groceries, and fill up the car at a gas station.

Kussila recalls the family’s excitement when her husband began to make progress. “Oh, gosh, it was a welcome sight,



Bhawani Prashad

because at least we know he’s moving forward. When he started to make words, we were very, very happy.”

Feldman, who was an art teacher in Quebec, also helped Prashad explore painting, an activity he was curious about. She taught him about paints, colours, shapes and artists. She also accompanied him to painting classes.

Art proved to be very helpful. Feldman explains that art can improve skills such as concentration and eye-hand coordination. Painting also gave Prashad an opportunity to work on his language skills. Feldman made lists of words related to his artwork, and they used the words as guidelines.

Much to his own surprise, Prashad is a talented artist. “Winter Wonderland,” a beautiful painting of a snow-covered house, was exhibited at the Abilities Arts Festival in 2005, and it also appears on Bayshore’s holiday greeting cards. Prashad’s newfound talent is a silver lin-



ing in the struggle he and his family have endured. It's also a reminder that great things can happen, even when a situation seems bleak.

Feldman says that family support during rehabilitation is essential. "It can make or break the therapy. Mr. Prashad's family was most, most helpful." For example, they frequently helped him with language exercises between Feldman's visits.

Kussila offers advice to people who have been injured. "Don't think you won't get well. If you keep a positive mind and thinking, you will get through every day, every year."

Feldman agrees that attitude is key. "Mr. Prashad has an unbelievable attitude – he wants to get better, he wants to get back to where he was. You can't let depression find its way into you. Each step has to be a positive step forward. You're in a different place in your life. Look at it as a challenge and new beginning."

Sean Hill is another example of courage and determination in the face of incredibly difficult circumstances. If you talk to the friendly 17-year-old or hear about his athletic accomplishments, you'll find it hard to believe that just over a year ago, an accident had his family fearing for his life.

Hill was training for a duathlon (a combination of running and cycling) in September of 2006 in his hometown of Orillia, Ont. when a car hit his bike from behind. He sustained a brain injury, a spinal fracture and facial fractures.

Hill returned home from the hospital after only a week, but his recovery journey was just beginning. Before the accident, he had been a confident young man, a member of the Air Cadets and an Honour Roll student. Suddenly, he needed assistance with daily tasks, and the whole family (Hill lives with his parents and has a sister) struggled to adapt.

Focus on Serious Injury Care is published by Bayshore Home Health for its serious injury clients and health care professionals. The views and opinions contained in *Focus on Serious Injury Care* are not necessarily those of Bayshore Home Health. For more information about this newsletter or to submit story ideas, please contact Bayshore Home Health's Marketing Department at 905.822.8075/1.800.668.9490 or email mmamak@bayshore.ca.

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Hill had been in excellent physical shape before the accident, but for several weeks, he was only able to take brief walks with his parents. As he gained strength and made progress with therapy, he became eager to get back on his bike. Despite their fears for his safety, his parents bought him a bike and trainer (a device to enable the use of the bike indoors).

His mother, Patricia, a client service coordinator at Bayshore's Barrie branch, says that Sean is determined to do his best, and has worked hard to get where he is today. "Sean will not tolerate self-pity. He's doing everything he can to be positive," she says. "The physiotherapy helped him overcome his limitations and encouraged him to keep going."

Hill agrees that rehabilitation was beneficial. "It was definitely helpful, both physically and emotionally, to have somebody there to support me," he says.

The emotional impact of his injuries was an enormous challenge. "The hardest part was acceptance of what I had gone through and how it was going to set me back," Hill says. "The best part was when I started racing – just that feeling of accomplishment from what I'd gone through."

Incredibly, Hill participated in four triathlons and a duathlon this year. His efforts earned him a first place victory plus second, two fourth and 10th place finishes. He says it's important to believe that success is possible. "If you don't have a positive attitude, you feel sorry for yourself, and with that you don't get much accomplished. That's the thing with racing and

exercising – it's really helped me keep a positive attitude. It gives me goals to work towards."



Sean Hill

Patricia is fiercely proud of her son's achievements and his determination to constantly improve. "It's like climbing a mountain – every day you have to take step. There are times when you feel like giving up, but you have to keep going. That's what Sean really points out to all of us."

With a wisdom far beyond his years, Hill adds, "Things will always get better. Even if they get worse and then they get better, there's always a light at the end of the tunnel. You have to work through the hard parts to get to the good stuff."

Hill and Prashad have both made progress with a combination of rehabilitation therapy, dedication to their personal passions, and persistence. While coping with a serious injury is an ongoing process, these men show that a positive attitude is a powerful ally on the journey back to health.