

focus on

Serious Injury Care

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Putting research into action: Sunnybrook's Centre for Spinal Trauma

Already a leader in caring for spinal cord injuries, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre is poised to boost innovation in this field with its new world-class Centre for Spinal Trauma. The goal is "to provide unmatched care while seeking a cure."

Sunnybrook, located in Toronto, cares for patients with complex, urgent needs, who are referred by more than 80 hospitals. It's Canada's largest centre for orthopedic surgery, treating more than 150 spinal fractures per year, and is known for offering patients the best chance of survival during the "golden hour," the period immediately following an injury when interventions are most likely to be effective.

The centre will help Sunnybrook advance research, clinical care and education. Strategic planning is still under way, but the centre is already offering excellent new resources for patients, including a free DVD, manual and journal titled *After and Beyond Spinal Cord Injury* that cover numerous aspects of living with spinal cord injury (SCI), such as activities of daily living, health and wellness, and self-advocacy.

The centre's clinical lead is Dr. Joel Finkelstein, a spinal surgeon and Section Head of Sunnybrook's Division of Orthopedics, as well as an Associate Professor in the University of Toronto's Department

of Orthopedic Surgery. He has been treating patients with SCI and conducting research since 1995.

Dr. Finkelstein says that a multidisciplinary committee will determine how best to facilitate the centre and achieve its goals. "We'll be spending on things to improve the clinical care of the spine, and things to improve research. The goal of research is to improve the quality of life of patients with SCI."

Dr. Finkelstein says that the centre is like a "lightning rod" for fostering coordination. "What I see as the big thing is the collaboration from acute care to rehabilitation," he explains, adding that research will help health professionals make this treatment pathway more seamless. "For someone with SCI, it's a major change in their quality of life and way of life, and there needs to be more than just physical management of it – there must be education and social support for patients and families, and that's something we can improve through a stronger teamwork type of approach."

He hopes that enough funds will be raised to hire a fellow, who would provide improved care and teach the next generation of spinal surgeons. Funds are also needed to continue supporting an advanced practice physiotherapist (APP),



Dr. Joel Finkelstein, spinal surgeon, Section Head of Sunnybrook's Division of Orthopedics and Associate Professor in the University of Toronto's Department of Orthopedic Surgery.

who sees patients in-clinic – a major benefit, since a referral to a surgeon for a consultation could take months. "If the APP thinks they need a surgeon, then they are seen quickly. This is a quick triage pathway [that starts] treatment faster," says Dr. Finkelstein.

Sunnybrook's overall spine program, which treats health issues such as spinal stenosis and cancer, will also benefit from the centre's activities. Already, the hospital has purchased improved surgical equipment. Dr. Finkelstein hopes that, in the future, there will also be more health professionals providing bedside care in the hospital and even making home visits.

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A portion of money raised will support a scientist to carry on spinal injury research. The centre will have a research partnership with the University of Toronto, and participate in multi-centre studies with St. Michael's Hospital and Toronto Western Hospital. "I think the centre is going to be a great model that raises awareness of spinal trauma," says Dr. Finkelstein.

Tracy Anthony, Sunnybrook's acute spinal cord injury nurse, has treated patients with traumatic injuries for nearly 20 years. She provides emotional and educational support to newly paralyzed people and their families, and provides hospital-wide educational support to nurses who provide direct patient care.

Anthony is excited about the Centre for Spinal Trauma's possibilities for improved patient care. "The care we provide is excellent, but there's always room for improvement – our resources are very limited right now. The equipment alone that this centre will provide for our patients will affect their stay, immediately," she explains.

After an injury, people often feel a sense of helplessness, and anxiety about how their lives will change. "We'll give them a glimpse into what's possible with the assistive devices we'll be able to purchase," says Anthony. "There will be hands-free phones and mobile, voice-activated units with a TV, DVD player, radio and computer. It's so simple, but it will hopefully give newly paralyzed people a glimpse into the independence that's possible after the acute care phase. I think that alone is going to be amazing."

Anthony is also looking forward to providing more information resources, including online tools, for staff. "SCI affects every single body system. New

Bayshore Home Health – a leader in serious injury home care

Bayshore Home Health is a Canadian-owned company and has been a trusted provider of home and community care services since 1966. It operates more than 50 home care offices and 20 community care clinics nationally, and works with many organizations that deliver specialized home care services to clients with serious injuries, including workers' compensation boards, auto insurers, rehabilitation service providers and government care agencies. To learn more about any of the services listed below, please call 1-866-265-1920.

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resources will help nurses understand how to best keep patients safe."

Spearheading the fundraising effort is Barry Munro, Chairman of the Canadian Spinal Research Organization (CSRO) and a strong advocate for research into spinal cord injury and neurotrauma. His law firm, Falconeri Munro Tucci LLP, has partnered with CSRO to donate \$5 million over 10 years.

"Sunnybrook is the number one trauma centre in the country, both in skill and volume," says Munro, who was treated at the facility when he injured his spine 20 years ago. "We're anticipating massive, long-term clinical studies for people with SCI in the next few years, and this is a way for Sunnybrook to be positioned for that need."

He is also excited that, when the centre's research yields new information and best practices, CSRO will disseminate those findings to the community. The organization is already collaborating with Bayshore Home Health, a home care agency with a national network of more than 50 branches.

"Bayshore is a leader in knowledge mobilization and providing SCI information to its staff across Canada. Best practices coming out of Sunnybrook can be shared with and implemented in the community via CSRO and Bayshore, which will also be involved in some of the centre's planning and work with CSRO as a fundraising partner," says Munro.

Bayshore will be involved in Falconeri Munro Tucci's golf tournament and CSRO's Run, Walk, Wheel'Athon at the Honda Indy Track in Toronto this summer. In 2011, it will take part in the Shoot for a Cure Bonspiel and it will sponsor the production of hundreds of copies of the *After and Beyond* resources.

"CSRO provides hope, support, camaraderie and educational tools. I'm very proud of Bayshore's commitment to support the Centre for Spinal Trauma through CSRO," says Suzanne Amodeo, a Business Development Manager for Bayshore, who will be joining the CSRO's Board of Directors. "Bayshore's goal is to improve clients' experience. With this partnership, we can get valuable education to our front-line staff, connect clients to CSRO's support network and raise research funds. It's an exciting time, and supporting the centre is a good way to give back to the community. It's about helping research become reality."

The long-term collaboration between Sunnybrook, CSRO and Bayshore bodes well for the care of spinal injuries not only in Canada, but internationally. "There's got to be partnership with the community and private sponsors to really improve the overall quality of our health system, and I think this is a great example," says Dr. Finkelstein. "With partnership, you'll see an improvement in the overall level of care."

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