

focus on

Serious Injury Care

Ideas, trends and solutions in serious injury care | February 2011 | www.bayshore.ca

Spinal cord injury program helps patients navigate health care system

An innovative program is changing the way people with a spinal cord injury are interacting with Ontario's health care system.

When a newly injured patient arrives at a Hamilton Health Sciences hospital, it assigns a "navigator" from the Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) Solutions Program to follow the patient's progress from admission and rehabilitation to community re-integration and beyond – and help solve problems along the way.

The program was launched three years ago with the goal of enhancing the navigator role that the Canadian Paraplegic Association Ontario (CPA Ontario) has offered for nearly 30 years. "The navigators connect earlier to clients, are more integrated into the teams, and have the enhanced ability to facilitate community integration," says Louise MacRae, SCI Solutions Project Manager at Hamilton Health Sciences.

Navigators act as guides through a system that can seem overwhelming and confusing. They are also liaisons between clients, service providers and funding agencies. "Unfortunately, our health care system is complicated, and the expectations of the individual have increased over the past few years," says MacRae. "In order to facilitate getting back into the community, you have to

advocate for yourself. SCI Solutions connects individuals with services that help facilitate that...and avoids unnecessary delays and barriers."

Three CPA Ontario navigators work closely with Hamilton Health Sciences' Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Program (which serves people living in Hamilton, Niagara, Haldimand, Brant, Waterloo and Wellington regions) and the health professionals involved in the care continuum, including physicians, nurses, occupational therapists and social workers. "The navigators have an office in the acute unit and rehab unit, so they're truly part of the team," says MacRae. Since SCI Solutions was launched, the navigators (two full-time, one part-time) have worked with more than 350 clients.

A person's need for a navigator changes over the course of their journey. The initial stages are most intense. Clients have many questions and require more services and resources. "We meet clients within a day or two of being injured or diagnosed," says navigator Aznive Mallett, adding that spinal cord injury is sometimes caused by disease rather than trauma. "We get to know people and help resolve issues and support their goals. The main one is re-integration into the community. There is a lot that has to happen. For example, we identify if their existing housing is accessible and, if not,



Louise MacRae, SCI Solutions Project Manager at Hamilton Health Sciences.

what will work, what equipment is needed, what funds are needed to renovate. There's a lot you have to identify and ask for before you can do the work"

When clients are discharged from the hospital, their navigators may help with tasks such as arranging attendant care or finding a therapist to address family and relationship issues. As clients adjust to life in the community, their need for assistance typically decreases and eventually stops. If they experience a life change, such as becoming a parent or returning to school, they can ask the navigators to help with the transition. Support is available to clients for virtually the rest of their lives.

2155 Dunwin Drive, Unit 10, Mississauga, Ontario L5L 4M1



Registered Company

“There’s really nobody else who tells clients what life is going to be like out there,” says Mallett. “Now there’s somebody on their side, and they know there’s somebody who’s going to do their best for them. It’s less stressful. When people have gone through a trauma and have life-altering disabilities or impairments, that alone is hard to deal with, but it’s even harder with questions like, ‘Can I work again?’ and ‘Where will I live?’”

Jason Sweet, a registered social worker in Hamilton Health Sciences’ Neurosciences and Trauma Program, works alongside the navigators. “There’s a lot of overlap between our roles. The navigators cross many different teams...and they are focusing on the bigger picture. They’re the people holding the umbrella, and we’re all standing underneath it.”

Sweet says it’s reassuring to know that people with spinal cord injuries have navigators assisting on their journey. “Every person responds to the injury, the deficits it creates and a sense of what the future holds in a unique way. The navigator is aware of how the person has adjusted across the continuum and what’s happened at each phase of care, which takes some of the burden away from the patient and family to have to keep track of everything,” he explains. “My involvement ends when the patient is discharged, but the navigator can follow them into the community and be a resource out there, and can reach back into rehabilitation or the [SCI] Alliance if the person needs more care.”

The SCI Solutions Alliance is a collaborative network of stakeholders who address challenges encountered by patients and navigators, with the goal of maximizing independence and quality of life. A key component of the SCI Solutions model is its 32 members who include people with disabilities, public and private service providers, researchers and organizations such as CPA Ontario and the Ontario March of Dimes.

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.

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.

Brain and spinal cord injury care • Wound and burn care • Fracture and amputation care • Palliative care • 24-hour nursing • Personal care and home support • Serious injury care planning • Safety assessments • Teaching • Care coordination with third parties

Another component of the model is peer support, which introduces recently injured people to trained volunteers with a spinal cord injury (or a family member with a spinal cord injury) who can share experiences and provide practical information. CPA Ontario has offered peer support for several years, but the launch of SCI Solutions has created more opportunities to make connections.

Early evaluations show the SCI Solutions model is effective at helping injured individuals access support services. The Alliance is now identifying barriers that impede the care process, undertaking a deeper evaluation of the model’s effectiveness and seeking best practices and considering how to implement them.

Momentum building for program

MacRae is optimistic that SCI Solutions will be adapted for other facilities, and she says that momentum is building in other parts of Ontario. “There were obstacles when we launched the program because we were two separate organizations, CPA Ontario and Hamilton Health Sciences, but everyone was committed. It wasn’t a matter of ‘Can we make it work?’ it was ‘How can we make it work?’” she explains, adding that success requires “equal partnerships, committed individuals, committed organizations and the participation of everyone who sees the value and the benefits to clients of getting back into the community.”

MacRae also hopes that the SCI Solutions model will lead to positive systemic changes. “By getting people to the table and addressing barriers and delays, we’ll have a more positive effect at the systems level, and leverage the solutions we’ve found for individuals to make broader changes. The focus of the Alliance is really capacity-building through networks and connections, joint problem-solving and priority setting.”

Organizations that serve people with disabilities, such as Bayshore Home Health, can make an important contribution to the SCI Solutions model. “Bayshore has been a strong supporter of CPA Ontario for some time,” says MacRae. “It is through partnerships with community organizations that we feel the model will be enhanced. We need all members of the continuum at the Alliance table, and we see Bayshore as an important part of that network.”

Bayshore is supportive of establishing SCI Solutions across Canada, says Suzanne Amodeo, a Business Development Manager for Bayshore. “This program is successful because it’s a natural progression. Patients have their doctor, nurse and SCI navigator,” she explains. “We’re a national company, and we feel it’s important to educate others and support replication of the model with our partner associations. Instead of reinventing the wheel, let’s take the wheel and move it to another place and encourage participation.”

For more information about SCI Solutions, contact Louise MacRae at 905-527-4322 ext. 44101 or macrael@hhsc.ca.