

# focus on

# Serious Injury Care

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

## Improving health care for people with brain injury

Every year, thousands of people in Canada sustain an acquired brain injury (ABI). An estimated 1.3 million Canadians – or one in 26 people – are living with a brain injury, and many don't know it. Brain injury is the number one killer and disabler of people under 44. We also know that most of those injured are young adults, and that it happens twice as often to men as it does to women.

There is still much we don't know. Thanks to advances in health care, more injured people are surviving, but there is no cure for the after-effects or the emotional, financial and social challenges that frequently accompany an ABI.

Brain injury affects individuals differently, but common problems include impaired reasoning skills, reduced concentration, memory loss, slower response time, and communication difficulties, including speech impairment. Many people also experience physical problems such as headaches, loss of vision, hearing or sense of smell, seizures and paralysis of the limbs.

Social situations can become challenging, as people have trouble with remembering names, communicating and recalling social skills. Emotional difficulties and depression are not uncommon; a person

may become more angry and impulsive. The survivor's personality can even undergo a significant change.

Treatment varies from person to person, and addresses various aspects of life with a brain injury, such as the cognitive, behavioural, educational, vocational and recreational. Even with treatment, people with ABI may require care up to 24 hours a day. Often, this task falls to family members who may be dealing with emotional difficulties of their own and may eventually suffer burnout.

Many families and individuals affected by ABI benefit from the assistance provided by home health care workers; however, the training programs available to people studying to become personal support workers (PSWs) are not standardized and brain injury may not be covered in depth. PSWs who work with clients with ABI are often not prepared to handle the challenges.

The Ontario Brain Injury Association (OBIA) is helping to change the situation with *Brain Basics*, an intensive two-day course for PSWs. It launched the program about five years ago, and so far 2,000 people have completed the training, says Ruth Wilcock, who became OBIA's executive director last fall.



Ruth Wilcock, Executive Director of the Ontario Brain Injury Association.

"Brain Basics provides an understanding of how the brain works, what happens when the brain is injured and how that affects behaviour," says Wilcock, who is excited about the program's "ripple effect." "How many more people are getting better care because 2,000 people have taken *Brain Basics* and understand some of the consequences of ABI?"

Wilcock offers the example of a support worker visiting a client who is withdrawn

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one day and has angry outbursts the next. “Some of the behaviours workers encounter ... if they don’t understand, they might take it personally or assume the person has mental health issues. But if the workers understand these are consequences of brain injury, they can have more compassion, which equates to better care.”

*Brain Basics* was developed by John Kumpf, OBIA’s former executive director and still a workshop leader. He prepared a two-day course for PSWs at Southwestern Ontario’s Conestoga College, and very quickly, other schools and a number of companies expressed interest in it. OBIA then partnered with Bayshore Home Health, Canada’s largest home health care provider, to develop the program into its current form.

OBIA teaches *Brain Basics* for community, private-sector and public-sector organizations. “We also have a train-the-trainer model, exclusive to Bayshore Home Health, where we train staff members who in turn train other staff,” explains Wilcock, adding that Bayshore is the only national organization that requires workers who care for clients with ABI to complete the course (of the 2,000 graduates, 700 are Bayshore employees). “We certainly want to give the accolades to Bayshore for their commitment to that.”

Zunobia Shafiqe is the Clinical Practice Leader who oversees Bayshore’s serious injury practices, and she is the liaison between the company and OBIA. “We have six managers across the country who took the course with John Kumpf and are now *Brain Basics* trainers, presenting this course to employees and family members,” says Shafiqe, who is herself a *Brain Basics* trainer. “This year, we’ve already had 85 Bayshore employees earn their certificate.”

David Jones of Bayshore’s Sarnia, Ont., branch became a certified trainer this year, and he already has trained several PSWs in

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## 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

Sarnia and at other branches. The Sarnia branch now matches program graduates to its brain-injured clients, says Area Director Charlene Taylor. “It’s really important for the right staff to go in and provide care. Sometimes, clients’ difficulties aren’t apparent at first, so there needs to be a greater understanding of how brain injury causes functional disability – problems with decision making, awareness about safety and things like that. Trained staff are better prepared and they get support from Jones, who has the empathy and ability to solve problems, and ensures that the client can function in his or her environment as well as possible.”

Bayshore’s Windsor, Ont., branch also has a *Brain Basics* trainer, Dee Wychreschuk, who has presented the program to several PSWs as well as Laura Kay, who recently became executive director of the Brain Injury Association of Windsor/Essex County. “Survivors come in and speak at one of the training sessions, so it’s very meaningful to the staff,” says Liz Daniel, the branch’s Area Director.

These two Bayshore branches have taken further steps to raise brain injury awareness in their communities. The Sarnia branch has a partnership with Alexander Mackenzie Secondary School, which offers students certification opportunities in personal support work in addition to their diplomas. “We’ve gone in and provided a lot of extra training, so students have increased knowledge of brain injury,” says Taylor.

The Windsor branch commissioned a performance of *After the Crash*, a moving

play about living with the effects of brain injury, which was presented last February. More than 100 people attended, including *Brain Basics* participants, neurology professionals from Hôtel-Dieu Grace Hospital and staff from Green Shield Insurance. “It was extremely well received in the community and with our staff,” says Daniel. “A nurse was so moved emotionally, she commented, ‘I wish I could go back in time and do some things over ... Going forward, I’m going to remember.’”

These efforts and the partnership between OBIA and Bayshore Home Health are innovative and groundbreaking, and they shed light on a national health problem that is only beginning to penetrate the public consciousness (for example, there has been a recent increase in media stories about the consequences of concussions, and the importance of protecting young athletes).

To learn more about brain injury and how to prevent it, or to find brain injury organizations in your province, visit the Brain Injury Association of Canada website at [www.biac-aclc.ca](http://www.biac-aclc.ca).

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*The Ontario Brain Injury Association is conducting a research study to understand the long-term effects of brain injury. It is seeking survivors and caregivers to participate. If you would like to take part, please contact Carla Thoms at 1-800-263-5404, ext. 227, or [cthoms@obia.on.ca](mailto:cthoms@obia.on.ca).*