Brain injury survivors deserve a second chance for a happy and fulfilling life

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Objectives

The Association for the Rehabilitation of the Brain Injured (ARBI) is the only community based, non-profit service provider in Canada providing intensive, long-term rehabilitation for survivors of the most severe traumatic and anoxic brain injuries. Survivors have an initial Glasgow Coma Scale (GCS) < 8 and require 24 hour care on admission to ARBI. Survivors receive 15 hours of weekly rehabilitation with an average length of stay of 2.4 years.

Through describing two case studies, we aim to demonstrate that severe brain injury survivors can have successful outcomes.

Methods

A recent Canadian critical care review of six hospitals indicated decisions regarding end of life are made often within the first three days of injury.1 ARBI has witnessed a significant decrease in the number of severe traumatic and anoxic brain injury referrals. In 2000, ARBI’s clientele consisted of 75% traumatic brain injury (TBI) and 25% anoxic brain injury (ABI) survivors. Currently, ARBI’s clientele consists of 18% TBI, 5% ABI and 77% stroke survivors. Over the past five years, 80% of families (of clients with TBI or ABI) reported being strongly advised by critical care physicians to withdraw lifesaving measures.

This report documents two of our recent severe TBI survivors throughout their recovery.

Lukasz’s story

September 5, 2008:
Lukasz was involved in a serious MVA at age 21. He sustained a very severe TBI with an initial GCS of 3.

Day 5:
The ICU physician strongly advised his family to remove life support.

Impact on Family:
His family refused and believed he would recover. As Lukasz emerged from his coma after one month, his family, who had been vigilant by his side, was elated to hear him say “Mama”.

Intensive Rehabilitation:
Lukasz received eight months of in-patient rehabilitation and an additional 36 months of intensive rehabilitation at ARBI.

Table: Rehab History

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Lukasz Today:
- Lives at home with his family and has an active social life
- Exudes positive energy
- Independent in ADL
- Walks independently with a cane
- Works out at the gym five days/week
- Participates in the PARTY program (Prevention of Alcohol and Risk Related Trauma in Youth), speaking to Grade 9 students about his experience and promoting smart choices
- Has travelled to Poland with family
- Participates in ARBI’s Community Kitchen Group preparing meals for his family
- Connects with friends using his iPad despite visual difficulties
- Featured on a TELUS commercial using iPad technology

Lukasz on Surviving Brain Injury:
“I can do anything I put my mind to.”

Jessica’s story

January 2010:
Jessica was involved in a serious MVA at age 17. She sustained a very severe TBI with an initial GCS of 3.

Day 10:
The ICU physician strongly advised her family to remove life support.

Impact on her Family:
Her parents were devastated by this recommendation. “It was a nightmare that no parents should have to go through,” commented Jessica’s mother. Against medical advice the family decided to continue treatment.

Intensive Rehabilitation:
Jessica received 13 months of in-patient rehabilitation and an additional 19 months of rehabilitation at ARBI.

Table: Rehab History

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Jessica Today:
- Worked part-time in an animal shelter
- Lives independently in her own home
- Works out regularly at her local fitness center
- Participates weekly in ARBI’s Leisure Skills Group
- Visits often with family and friends
- Plans to complete Grade 12 diploma

Jessica’s Comments on Surviving Brain Injury:
“Don’t give up. Keep on smiling and work hard. You can do it. You deserve all you’ve dreamt for!”

Conclusions

ARBI has 35 years of experience providing intensive, long-term rehabilitation for survivors of the most severe brain injury. These case reports highlight just two of many positive outcomes we have witnessed.

ARBI strongly believes that brain injury survivors deserve a second chance to live a happy and fulfilling life.

*Halvar Jonson Centre for Brain Injury Inpatient Rehabilitation, Ponoka, Alberta.

References: