

Now What? Community Reintegration after Acquired Brain Injury

Symposium

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You've just watched my story so I guess, I can go home!

Actually, since I assume many of you here today have survived some kind of brain injury, I want to say a few things to you, particularly.

Isn't it amazing how much each of us has learned about brain injury after it happens to us!!

Certainly for me, I knew very little about strokes or any kind of brain injury before that morning nearly 5 years ago, 26 November 2012. Since then, I've paid a LOT more attention!

When I finally sat down with a neurologist, nearly 3 months after the stroke, he showed me on the screen, a CAT scan taken of my brain, the day I ended up in ER after my stroke. He pointed out a cloudy area near the base of my brain that looked cloudy. He told me that the cloudy area was in a part of my brain called the cerebellum. He said that it was cloudy because when the blood clot lodged in that area it cut off blood supply to that part of my brain and because of the lack of oxygen the cloudy area was damaged. He explained the cerebellum is a critical area of the brain that controls coordination and balance. That's why I had extreme nausea and couldn't even stand up at first.

2 or 3 years later when I saw another brain scan, I saw the same area was now black!

When I asked WHY? The neurologist told me that the black area was fluid. Said the brain tissue in that area had died as a result of no oxygen for a few hours and the dead brain material had been taken away by my bloodstream as part of the body's healing process. The hole left behind is now filled with fluid!

So that part of my brain is gone! It's not gonna grow back! No wonder things are different!!

I'm thankful that most of the functions I lost with loss of brain material has been taken over by the surrounding brain cells. Since this requires new neural pathways to grow, and it's a VERY slow process! No wonder recovery is so slow! And the functions regained aren't quite the same. Although I can stand and walk now, drive a car and generally function fairly well, it's not quite the same! When I stand up, I kinda feel drunk! I never fall down but I'm just a bit tipsy!

I'm glad that our brains are amazing computers that are able to grow new pathways to replace damaged or lost ones!

Some of you here today have experienced much more extensive damage than I have and I salute you, all of you that haven't given up and have kept working day after day, week after week, and

some, year after year! As the new pathways have grown so you've recovered lots of the functions you've lost!

The best news is the recovery process can continue as long as you keep breathing (so oxygen gets to your brain!) and keep trying (so neural pathways are stimulated to develop).

As my good friend Pat says, 38 years after his stroke:

NEVER GIVE UP!