

Outcomes of CORE Long-Term Residents: Neuroplasticity and Stability

Annually, CORE clinical staff sit down to evaluate each long-term resident using the Mayo-Portland Adaptability Inventory—4th Edition (MPAI-4), a well-established instrument in the industry. The MPAI-4 provides scales to rate each resident in the areas of Ability, Adjustment, and Participation. Conventional wisdom has painted a bleak picture of aging: a gradual, inevitable decline. Further, this process has been thought to be accelerated in individuals with neurological disabilities. However, recent research in neuroplasticity has informed us that the human brain can change positively at any age, and under many adverse circumstances. We are only beginning to tap the potential of this phenomenon, and with every scientific discovery, the future becomes brighter and brighter.

Our group of long-term residents at CORE includes individuals in their sixth, seventh, and eighth decades of life. Disabling conditions include acquired brain injuries, psychiatric illnesses, and developmental conditions (e.g., autistic spectrum disorders). Over the past year, relative stability was observed in our residents, with the total score declining by only about 2.6 points. This pattern was relatively uniform across the three content areas (Ability, Adjustment, and Participation). However, this decline was not uniform across all residents, as approximately 40% of the residents improved their score over the past year. Despite the fact that our residents (and in truth, everyone)

periodically experiences an illness or other life situation that temporarily strains overall functioning, there is good evidence in these statistics that positive neuroplasticity is occurring in our long-term residents.

At CORE, we strive to capitalize on the principles of neuroplasticity to the benefit of all of our residents. We continually review the scientific literature and revise our curriculum to utilize the latest findings. Within the past year, we have instituted several cognitive groups that are enjoyable yet cognitively challenging. For example, we know that participation in novel experiences promotes positive neuroplasticity, and, therefore, we began a group that exposes our residents to novel experiences, from new foods or cultural experiences to performing familiar tasks in a novel way. By staying on top of the latest findings, it is our goal to ensure that overall functioning and quality of life are maximized for every resident of CORE.

Family & Resident Spring Carnival

★ . . . May 14, 2011 . . . ★
★ . . . 1–4 p.m. . . . ★

Hilltop Campus

Games, Food, Music & Resident Art Display



Legislative Update

The state of Texas is facing what is estimated to be a record \$25 billion shortfall this fiscal year and our elected officials have rightly made expense cuts the top, maybe only, priority for the current legislative session. However, cuts without consideration of the economic consequences looks more to be political grandstanding than leadership. As Michael Milken, chairman of FasterCures, wrote in a recent Wall Street Journal op-ed piece, "Improved public health translates directly into greater national productivity, which underpins all economic growth." The same holds true for Texas, especially when it comes to the incidence of acquired brain injury, the top reason for lost work productivity in the United States.

Our advocacy in the Texas Legislature this year focuses almost solely on drastic budget cuts to the DARS Comprehensive Rehabilitation Services (CRS) program. These cuts which were already enacted and leave hundreds on the waiting list until the 2012 fiscal year will immediately worsen the state's fiscal crisis because it costs more to house people with brain injuries in nursing homes than to simply rehabilitate them. If these individuals stay in nursing homes, the liability becomes long-term and will run in the millions of dollars.

The two best recognized annual surveys of nursing home rates are conducted by insurance carriers: The Genworth Financial Survey of Nursing Homes and the MetLife Survey of Long Term Care Costs. These recent surveys found that the annual average cost for nursing home care in Texas is between \$61,000 and \$107,000; based on the level of care required to keep a person safe. People with brain injuries require more services than a typical nursing home patient. They will often be younger, stronger and many times cognitively and behaviorally impaired to the point of requiring private rooms and require frequent prompting and cues to stay oriented to place, day, and schedule. Compare this \$61,000 and \$107,000 annual cost to the average

per case cost for the CRS Program in 2010 of \$49,000. So the immediate cost increase this fiscal year may well be between \$12,000 and \$58,000 for every CRS consumer who languishes on the waiting list. Additionally, the state signs on to long term financial liability if the right services are not delivered in a timely way so as to maximize a person's rehabilitation. And as a reminder, the greatest number of injuries happen in males aged 18 - 35. So if a 20 year old male does not receive rehabilitation and he lives to be 65 in a nursing home, the cost of life care will easily reach into the millions of dollars for the state.

Fiscal responsibility in this case would be to STOP the cuts to the DARS CRS program because this program is not some sort of perk or meal-ticket. This program is funded for the simple reason that it makes economic sense. The math is simple and the mission is clear: we should not follow a fiscal crisis with a knee-jerk reaction to cut expenses across the board when those cuts may be counter-productive.

We will continue our work to advocate through public testimony and personal visits to the offices of elected officials. George Yessian, who is the current public policy co-chair for the Brain Injury Association of Texas is helping to coordinate testimony among survivors and family members who benefited from the CRS program and who are not dependent on state funded long term care. Also providing testimony is Dalton Goode. Dalton survived a brain injury and received rehabilitation through the help of the CRS program and is now employed full-time at CORE, sharing his life experiences with others. We will continue to educate our elected officials so that a fiscal crisis is not followed by an economic blunder.

You can help too by sending an email to your elected officials through the Brain Injury Association of Texas website at: <http://capwiz.com/biatx/home/>

Foundation Corner

The CORE Health Foundation celebrates our 5th Anniversary this month! In line with the mission of being an advocate for all individuals with disabilities, the organization has recently received approval from the Austin City Council to build an ADA accessible fishing pier on Lady Bird Lake. This project has been in the works for many years and we are excited to begin fundraising to make this pier a reality.

Additionally, the Foundation held very successful events in October to kick off our Resilient Mind Neuroplasticity Research project. We are planning future events to spread awareness about “The Brain’s Ability to Change” and what this will mean for the future of rehabilitation and healthy aging.

The research project involves evaluating individuals, who have sustained a traumatic brain injury, in a community residential rehabilitation setting through Function Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI). Currently participants receive an initial fMRI prior to admitting to CORE Health Care and are involved in post-acute rehabilitation in addition to an enhanced cardiovascular program. At the completion of this five month program, individuals will receive a second fMRI to measure the structural and functional changes they have experienced in this time period. These results will allow for future large-scale research designed to change the future of treatment interventions for TBI.

We are working diligently to secure grants for all of our programs. If you are interested in further information, volunteering or donating to any of these projects, please contact Nicole at nharmon@corehealthfoundation.org or 512-894-0801 ext 23.

James S. Misko, PsyD, co-owner and President of CORE Health Care, was recently named Chairman-Elect to the Brain Injury Association of America (BIAA) Board of Directors. Dr. Misko has served BIAA since 2004 in progressively more responsible volunteer leadership positions helping to expand the association’s advocacy, legislative influence, and certification programs. In his new role Dr. Misko will be responsible for helping to increase access to brain injury care and influence awareness and understanding of brain injury, as well as securing funding to help the BIAA accomplish these initiatives. “Dr. Misko is a talented clinician and a visionary leader,” said Susan H. Connors, president/CEO of the Brain Injury Association of America. “We are honored to have Dr. Misko as Chairman-Elect of BIAA’s board. His commitment to helping improve the quality of life for people who have survived traumatic brain injuries makes Dr. Misko a very valuable addition to our executive committee.” Dr. Misko will serve a two year term as Chair-Elect, and will then move into his role as Chairman of the Board in 2012. Dr. Misko also serves as the Chair of the Academy of Certified Brain Injury Specialists (ACBIS), a standing committee of the Brain Injury Association of America (BIAA).

CORE Health Care residents and staff believe in giving back to the community. Most recently the long term care residents organized a food drive for the Grace Food Pantry in Dripping Springs. They put specially marked boxes at each unit to collect items and the residents will count the food and supplies donated and announce the winning unit.

Many CORE employees have been participating in philanthropic events throughout the Hill Country to benefit their favorite charities. Speech Therapist, Jerilyn Iliff, was in “Four Tickets to Christmas”, a community theater Christmas musical benefitting the First Baptist Church of Wimberley. Multiple staff members have participated in the Diva 5K benefitting Pflugerville ISD’s Hendrickson High School, the 5th Annual CACCC Valentine 5K Fun Run/Walk benefitting the Children’s Advocacy Center of Comal County, Austin Half Marathon benefitting 26 local Austin charities and the Tough Mudder benefitting the Wounded Warrior Project. Additionally, Direct Care staff, Amelia Dlamini has been working to assist the homeless in Oak Hill.

We are very proud of a staff that works to better our community.



CORE Staff kicking off the Diva 5k

The CORE Difference



Knowledge of the brain's neuroplasticity has taught us that no matter the distance from the injury, the brain still has the ability to change and improve under positive structured rehabilitative conditions. One of the best examples of this principle is the significant improvements made by Randy Armstrong. Randy sustained a traumatic brain injury when he was hit by a drunk driver at the age of 20. Following his accident he participated in rehabilitation at a few locations and saw initial improvements. He began to relearn to walk, eat safely, speak more articulately and perform activities of daily living but he continued to struggle with the residual behavioral and cognitive effects of the injury.

In the time between Randy's accident and his admission to CORE, he had married and fathered two children. These new roles in his life made it very evident that he was not prepared to be successful due to deficits, including executive dysfunction, impulsivity, poor judgment and decision making, and confabulation. He often chose unsafe behaviors causing him multiple hospitalizations and deconditioning of his body with increased pain. Additionally, he had been unable to adequately manage his medications and began to have an addiction to pain medications. He became isolated, sedentary and had an erratic sleep schedule. As a result, he was unable to hold a job and these struggles began to take a toll on his family.

Upon his admission to CORE, Randy had not received rehabilitation in over 10 years and he was 13 years post-injury. His family was motivated for Randy to seek treatment but Randy was not fully on board and was in denial that his life had begun to unravel. The clinical team at CORE was able to help Randy refocus his passions and drive for life, set long-term goals and begin to rebuild his damaged relationships. During his time at CORE, the structured and nurturing environment helped him to address his addictions, educate him about making smarter decisions and safer choices, improved his balance and physical strength, and enhanced his communication and social skills. Randy and his wife participated in family therapy to identify triggers that caused problems in their communication and barriers to a successful relationship.

Since discharging from CORE, Randy has gained employment and has experienced positive reviews for his work. He is a much more active participant in the care of his children and his home and he has worked hard to be a partner to his wife. His wife states that, "We are working hard to put all of the communication skills we learned into practice. I think we talk more now than we ever did before and it does not turn into a knock-down drag-out



session." He has utilized the skills he learned at CORE to navigate the city bus system and can be more independent in outings. She is thrilled that Randy is able to do all of the grocery shopping,



A recognized leader in the advancement of neuroplasticity.

laundry, washing dishes and takes great joy in taking his kids for bike rides and reading to them at night. He participates in anger management and AA classes and is safer in his wheelchair. Together they are enjoying watching their kids participate in basketball, martial arts and ballet with a renewed outlook for their future.

Many of our therapists knew Randy when he was first injured and have remarked that he has grown from a severely injured teenager to a responsible husband and father. Randy's brain, like all of our brains, is plastic and able to change and learn new strategies and information at any point in life.



Brain Injury Association of Texas 27th

Annual Statewide Conference

"Coming Together"

April 14 - 17, 2011

Marriott Austin South

www.biatx.org

(512) 326-1212

Survivors, Families and
Brain Injury Professionals Welcome!

This is our last printed newsletter.

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