

IF I KNEW THEN WHAT I KNOW NOW

By Bill Tyda

© May, 2005

As I approach my 11th year post stroke and my 60th year of life, I look back over the last 10 years and I think of what I would have done differently (Rod Stewart said it best in his song: "If I knew then what I know now"). That, however, is not reality. What is reality is the day-to-day life we live after having experienced a stroke. As I am approaching "elder statesmanship," perhaps rather than looking back and asking "Did I do it right?" I can share some experiences and observations.

It took me some time (and I still have to remind myself) to come to the realization that "my stroke" is in fact unique to me. My character; my physical and emotional being pre-stroke; and the areas of my brain affected all contribute to the uniqueness of "my stroke." I think I have finally come to the conclusion that there can be no comparison of one survivor to another. We are each unique unto ourselves. With the help of the rehab team we each come to that understanding; the sooner the better. For some that realization may come during the immediate period after stroke; for others it may take years. So avoid comparisons!

Reality assessment is critical. Can I return to work, if so in what capacity? What is my true financial situation? How independent can I realistically expect to be? All this takes a team to answer. That team is family and the rehab team. The sooner these questions can be answered, the quicker you can come to grips with accepting the answers. Even though many answers were, and continue to be, not to my liking, I have dealt with each in order to resolve them.

Rehabbing--- get as much as quick as you can. There really is a "window of opportunity" to regain lost function. That window closes quickly! With the help of your team, define it and use it before the window closes!

Outside services available to us (there are a bunch) may include social services. With the help of the social services member of your rehab team get them defined and applied for as soon as possible.

I have mentioned family as part of your team to help with your recovery process. Remember that as painful as it may be to see your loved ones affected by this traumatic event, it not only happened to you but to your family as well. As much as I would have liked to have taken on this burden alone, the reality is that I can't and must therefore include those I love.

Daily exercise is now part of your life; besides, it is good for you along with a reasonably balanced diet.

Finally, a comment on fatigue. Usually an unknown that must be dealt with and compensated for. I have learned the fine art of napping and find that I enjoy it!

Now get on with the first day of the rest of your life before it is too late! Here's hoping that in 10 years you are not singing, "If I knew then what I know now."