

THERE'S REHAB AND THEN THERE'S REHAB!

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On July 29, 1989, I went to bed as usual with my mind on awaking at 5:00 AM to go to my job at a local university medical center, where I had only worked for three weeks. I am one of those persons who does not need an alarm clock to get up, so promptly at 5:00 AM I awoke to find myself in the throes of a stroke. I don't know how I knew exactly what was happening to me, but I did. I got the paramedics and was able to open my door, but there was still a problem. The door leading outside my building where I needed to let in the paramedics was down about six steps and I could not get down them. The police had to be summoned to wake my neighbors so they could go down and open the door for the paramedics. The paramedics took me to the hospital nearest my house, where I was admitted.

Two very good things happened to me while I was there. First, every Saturday there was a neurologist from rehab who volunteered at this hospital. That Saturday when he came and saw me, he said to me, "You are a good candidate for rehab. Tell these people you want to go to a rehabilitation hospital." After seeing that doctor, all my thoughts were on going to rehab.

Second, the very next day my boss, who is a physician, came to visit me. He asked me how I was doing, and I responded that the hospital was a terrible place for me. He then asked if I wanted him to have me moved to the hospital where I was working where he could take care of me, and I responded, yes! The very next day, my boss had me moved to the hospital where we worked. After an uneventful three week stay there, I was transferred to rehab.

Upon arriving at rehab, I was very depressed, even to the point that I had no appetite. When my tray of food would come, I would just pick at it. At this time, I was given a doctor to talk to. I did not know just how depressed I was until I started talking to the therapist and things just started pouring out. I think that psychological therapy should automatically be included as part of the treatment for stroke survivors.

Even in my depressed state, I was a very cooperative patient. There was never a time when asked to do something that I said, "I can't." It was always, "I will try." This attitude seemed to have gotten me a long way with my rehab. The therapists were sometimes amazed at my progress. After five weeks, it was decided that my time there was up, and I could finish my rehab as an outpatient. I was not ready for the outside world and I practically begged them to let me stay another week, which they did. I was an outpatient for about one year, but have come back for more outpatient therapy on numerous occasions.

In the sixteen years since my stroke, I have been involved with so many things surrounding my rehabilitation. In 1990, I was asked to be the subject in a video about how stroke survivors are treated at rehab. This video was to be used in the training of future therapists. During the ten week process of making the video, I was given intense therapy. I was helped as much as the therapists who would be using this for their training. On many occasions, I have participated in research projects that have not particularly helped me directly, but I hope that down the road these studies may help the next stroke survivor.

I think that coming to rehab not only made my recovery better, but periodically gives me a chance to perhaps help someone else. There are no guarantees as to the outcome regarding recovery after a stroke, but what is guaranteed is that if you do nothing, you won't have any recovery to worry about!