



Moving Forward One Day at a Time

A hockey injury in June 2008 broke his neck, fracturing vertebra in his spine, but 15-year-old Ben Stear is determined to walk again. As a patient at Shriners Hospitals for Children — Philadelphia, he is receiving care from professionals specifically trained in treating spinal cord injuries in adolescents.

Ben, a high school sophomore, was initially classified as having a complete spinal cord injury – a total or near-total loss of motor function and sensation below the level of injury. Within 72 hours, he was reclassified as having an incomplete injury, giving him and his family hope that he could regain some or all motor function below the injury in his neck.

After 17 days in intensive care and two major surgeries, Ben was stable and ready to begin rehabilitation. He could feel sensation all over his body and was able to move his arms, shoulders and wrists. He spent two months at a specialty hospital in Georgia, where he worked hard to sharpen the fine motor skills of his hands, wrists and fingers. Ben was then transferred to Shriners Hospitals for Children — Philadelphia, where doctors and staff supported his goal to walk again.

“The doctor was incredibly thorough and really got to know my son,” said Dawn Stear, Ben’s mom. “We were also very impressed by how positive and supportive the staff was; anytime he started to regain even the slightest bit of movement, they were very hopeful. You don’t always get that, and I think encouragement is a huge part of the healing process.”

Ben’s therapy at Shriners Hospitals for Children included several different electronic stimulation bikes, which are stationary bicycles that he can use while seated in his wheelchair. The therapist attaches electrodes to his skin, allowing the computer to send low-level electrical impulses to his legs. These impulses cause coordinated contractions of his muscles, which keeps his legs toned and strong. Ben also practices weight-bearing in a standing device, which helps him increase bone mass.

Throughout his stay at the hospital, Dawn was encouraged by the staff’s focus on transition. “The staff always took great care that my husband and I were prepared to take care of Ben,” she explained.



Ben and his younger brother, Mason, pose for the camera at the Benefit Golf Outing and Banquet Dinner, an event hosted by friends and family in Ben’s honor.

“It took about a month before he was able to come home full-time, but before that happened, they sent him home for one night and then two nights the following weekend. When we’d bring him back to the hospital, they’d answer all of our questions and work out any issues we had. The nursing staff were adamant about not sending him home until we were ready, making for a safe and successful situation when that day finally came.”

Since Ben returned home, the living room has transformed into a rehabilitation gym. He is increasing his therapy, under the supervision of doctors, to help ready his body for the challenge of walking again.

“In spinal cord injury, things can change very quickly, so you have to be on the cutting edge,” Dawn said. “We’re just taking it one day at a time and waiting for movement to return. He can now feel light touch all over his body and wiggle the toes on both of his feet. All we can do is move forward!”

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