

Impacts of cognitive cognitive injuries on communication



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Introduction

It is an amazing moment when a baby arrives and the midwife announces you have given birth to a healthy baby boy or girl. It is as if the whole world is rejoicing with you. This is the kind of news that makes everybody smile and want to share your joy. To be born in perfect health is all a parent wishes for their child.

As we grow into adults, we adopt dreams and ideas, plans and adventures. We are thankful for our strength, health and youth. The elderly especially encourage us to 'live life to the full', while at the same time insisting that 'youth is wasted on the young'.

But what happens when you are struck with an illness, or have a life changing accident. When you are faced with the news that everything dependable and familiar about yourself that you have lived with from birth, has altered or even become totally foreign to you. Who are you now? What does your future hold? Where do you go from here? When are things going to go back to normal? Why me? How am I going to live with this? All the answers you have accumulated in your life, have now been replaced with questions.

Definition

Remember when you learned to walk and talk? Probably not, because we were so young at the time. Even if we don't remember it happening, there were other people around us to witness our first achievements. More than likely these were moments of joy and pride. We would have had loved ones supporting us with love and encouragement. Imagine you are a grown adult
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and you are experiencing this stage of life for a second time. For people suffering from severe cognitive injury, this could be what it is like for them.

Rehabilitation after a traumatic or non traumatic injury is a scary and lengthy process. A patient is affected on every level, from physical to mental, social to practical. Even though it is emotional to see a loved one soon after the effects of brain injury, the immediate effects are usually not the permanent result. Patients usually progress over time, but may never return to who they originally were. It takes time , patience and persistence for someone to advance from their immediate side effects.

Patients who have been effected physically take on extensive physiotherapy to get their muscle strength back and retrain their body. Mental injuries are treated with counselling and medication. Although these are key to improving a person, support and understanding from loved ones is a major factor. Socially a persons life is flipped over. The casual familiar side of a persons life is replaced with confusion and frustration. Practically a person may need to learn again from scratch, depending on the extent of the injury. Brain injury leaves a person starting over.

Although cognitive injury sounds hopeless and dark, there is actually a bright light at the end of the tunnel. Depending on the type of damage, which area of the brain, and to what extent the damage is done, each individual has a different story.

There are a lot of different types of injuries.

- Alzheimers disease.

- Brain tumors.
- Stroke.
- Traumatic brain injury(TBI).

Alheimers

This disease would be a common form of dementia. It is mostly known for effecting the elderly, but has been known to go beyond that. Alheimers can cause a person to forget most of their current life and go back to a time of their youth. They may forget who their children are, the home they moved to when they got married and the life that came there after. It can become very difficult to communicate when the mind falls into confusion. It will take patience and kindness to find new ways of communication. Being able to adapt and finding a new structure will be very helpful. Body language, facial expressions and tone, will become their more dominant forms of communication.

Traumatic brain injury (TBI)

This can occur through a car accident, a fall or any major hit to the head. The contact to the head can cause a swelling or bleeding to the brain , which effects the normal running and understanding of things. Depending where in the brain you are effected, the results can be different for everyone. No two injuries or side effects are the same. People go through any number of treatments, from speech therapy to physiotherapy. Surgery can be successful in some patients, but is not always the answer.

Stroke

This can have varied effects on people. It is caused when the blood flow through an artery becomes blocked, and prevents oxygen entering the brain.

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This can have a range of effects. Speech and language, mobility and facial muscles can all be effected, depending on the level of stroke.

Brain tumors

These are abnormal growth of cells in one area, that clusters together to form a lump. Depending on where in the brain the tumor is pressing against, that will distinguish how the body is effected. It can effect speech, sight, smell, hearing, emotions and physical use of the body. It also has the ability to change intellect and personality.

The overall result to anyone afflicted by damage to the brain, is that there will be significant changes to who they truly are. The common factors of the effects on communication are treated through rehabilitation. People will discover new ways to express themselves and it is challenging. When speech, body language, facial expressions and intellect change in a person, it is like meeting yourself for the first time, and finding your personality and new found talents. Overall there is a lot of adapting to be done, in order to get through each day.

These changes also effect the family and friends who support them. Those who know this person well, will know them for their health and intellect. The people who choose to stay and support someone with a cognitive injury, will also find themselves being directly effected. Emotional strain can bring out the different sides of a person. This includes both the sufferer and supporters. Families deal with less free time, problems with finance, communication problems, and changing roles within the family. Emotions can go from happy and content and in control, to sadness, anxiety, anger,

guilt and frustration. Families have been torn apart and friends have slipped away. It can feel like a lost cause.

We have all experienced a time when we feel like we have fallen into a dark hole. It is cold, dark and lonely. It can leave us feeling scared, and helpless. Falling into a situation when you don't know why everything has become strange and foreign, can be terrifying. We can become desperate for communication, for someone to say its ok. A familiar face or voice would become a saviour. But it could become a struggle to search for anything we relate to. What used to be our present time, can become obsolete and be replaced by what are distant memories. It is confusing and frustrating for everyone involved. Adapting to a new normality is a transition that does not have to be done alone.

There are healthcare facilities, day care centres and counselling available for support. There are healthcare assistants, doctors and nurses available, who are trained and dedicated to helping rebuild communication and physical skills, and achieve the best quality of life. Because each brain injury is so unique, the help given is to achieve individual personal best. This is needed for the patient, family and friends. The extent of who a brain injury effects is like the branches of a tree. Thankfully the services provided encourage persistence.

There are treatments available through many different forms. This also depends on the extent of the brain injury and what type. Treatment will usually begin immediately or as soon as damage is detected. It is crucial to keep the oxygen flowing to the brain and through the body, which helps

blood flow. This will also help control blood pressure. Visual examinations will be done in the form of x-ray or ct-scan. Severely injured patients will receive more extensive treatments such as, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, psychology/psychiatry and social support. It is a lengthy process and so much to deal with, but treatment is hope and a positive step to beginning again.

Conclusion:

Sufferers of cognitive injuries can learn to adjust and rise again. They discover a new kind of normal. Life is difficult for us all at times. We struggle with finance, career and family. But for those waking up and struggling each day to remember where they are and why they cant find the words to ask a question, or not understanding why menial jobs that never bothered them before, now cause them to lose their temper. These are some of the challenges facing a person with a cognitive injury. Life is known for its challenges and human strength is powerful and admirable. “ Out of difficulties grow miracles.”

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