

## Taking Time to Heal

It was Mary Collier's 67th birthday that day. A day spent with family and friends. At the end of the evening Mary and her husband Roger decided to cap off the evening with a cup of coffee.

Because the freeway was closed that evening, they stayed on the surface streets. As they were crossing Grand River Boulevard in Detroit, they were hit broadside by another vehicle entering the intersection on the passenger side where Mary was riding. The impact of the crash sent their car into a building across the intersection. To get Mary out of the vehicle, emergency crews had to use the Jaws of Life® to extract her, and get both her and Roger to the hospital as quickly as possible.

From this accident, Roger came away with a concussion and his right leg shattered from the knee down. Mary's injuries were quite significant, in fact, Mary remembers nothing of the accident. She lost consciousness, had broken ribs and a severe traumatic brain injury. She was placed on a ventilator immediately at the hospital and over the course of her stay, medical complications included vocal cord paralysis and hydrocephalus. A shunt was placed to drain excess fluid and relieve the pressure in her brain to prevent further damage.

Her daughter, Vonita White, recalls her mother lying still in the hospital for a full week before she was able to open her eyes for the first time.

### Turning the Tables

Mary spent 31 years helping people as a social welfare worker for the state of Michigan. She helped families of newly injured persons to understand their health insurance and, if needed, get them signed up for food stamps, Medicaid, etc. For Mary and her family, they would learn what it was like to be on the other side of the fence, and experience what it was like to be the patient or a family member of a patient.

### Getting Started

After spending two weeks in the acute care hospital, Mary began her rehabilitation journey for six weeks at the Rehabilitation Institute of Michigan (RIM). In October of 2009, Mary came to Rainbow's NeuroRehab Campus (NRC) with many rehabilitation goals. Mary could not walk or feed herself. She required one-to-one supervision and assistance because of increased fall risk during transfers, decreased problem solving and judgment and she was at risk for pulling her tubes out.



*Roger and Mary Collier*

From a cognitive standpoint, she was unable to follow one-step directions, and she had significant impairments with both long-term and short-term memory, was oriented to person only and was very impulsive, lethargic and confused. In short, Mary had a long row to hoe.

During her first six months at Rainbow, Mary participated in a full array of therapies including physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech language pathology and recreational therapy. She made measured, steady progress during this time. So much so, that her family desired to take her home after six months. Mary's daughter Vonita noted that the therapists "told us to wait. They told us they wanted to keep working with her—they didn't feel they were done."

Melanie Eplin MPT, CBIS, Mary's physical therapist, emphasized this point too— "She had more gains to make and she had potential for greater functional progress and greater independence. Stopping therapy at that time, especially in an environment conducive to her needs, would have surely impeded her future functional gains."

Looking back, Vonita said the therapists were right. Soon after crossing that six-month milestone, something changed. Mary started showing progress...and fast. "Mary just took off," said Karen Violette, LRT, RRT, CBIS, Mary's respiratory therapist.

### Learning the Basics

As Mary made gains, and became stronger, she was able to participate more in therapy, and to make functional gains at

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a fantastic pace. She worked with her therapists in a variety of areas, to get her to her ultimate goal—back to home with family.

Occupational Therapist Alison Thom OTR/L, CBIS, worked with Mary on basic activities of daily living and safety with functional mobility. Mary's endurance increased and they worked on her upper extremity strength and fine motor coordination. Her one-to-one supervision was discontinued and she received general supervision throughout the NRC. By the time she discharged to home, Mary was able to complete all basic activities of daily living without assistance and was independent in her room with transfers. Mary met all of her individual goals and objectives she needed to make in order to progress to home!

In physical therapy, Mary saw Melanie Eplin only three times per week primarily due to her decreased ability to participate. As Mary improved, she was able to increase her physical therapy activities to five times per week. Melanie's focus of treatment was on transfers, wheelchair mobility and balance. As those activities improved for Mary, the focus shifted to ambulation and functional mobility.

Melanie noted that Mary demonstrated significant improvement over the course of her rehabilitation. She progressed from being unable to walk, to ambulating with a walker and then progressing to a cane. When Mary discharged to home, she was able to walk independently without an assistive device on multiple surfaces.

A big challenge for Mary was the installation and maintenance of her tracheostomy. Karen Violette trained Mary and Roger on proper care and reinstallation in the event it came out. "They both were hesitant at first to care for it on their own," said Karen. "But the longer she had it, the more comfortable they both became." Karen's training came in handy one evening for Roger, as he had to reinstall the trach when it fell out. Because of that, he now feels more confident in helping Mary care for her trach.

Mary received speech & language pathology (SLP) services from Lisa Niziolek, MA, CCC-SLP, CBIS at the NRC. When Mary was first admitted to Rainbow, she was unable to consistently follow simple one-step directions, answer yes/no questions, or answer personal questions related to herself and her family. Her expressive and receptive language impairments

negatively affected her ability to participate in conversation and she was unable to complete many parts of the SLP evaluation.

By the time Mary discharged home from the NRC, she had made significant progress with her speech, language and cognitive goals. Her goals had progressed to working on high-level problem solving and reasoning exercises, math computations (including checkbook management) and memory exercises.

Her NRC therapists noted that when she was ready to go home, Mary was able to interact in her environment, and hold meaningful conversations with others, including the numerous other clients she befriended. Her memory improved, providing her a better context for functioning with her family. Melanie Elpin noted that, "By the time she discharged from the NRC, her personality blossomed—she could hold conversations, and she was so pleasant—a real joy to be around!"

### **Integrating Back to Home**

After nearly a year at Rainbow's NRC, Mary successfully transitioned back to her home while receiving continued treatment from Rainbow's Functional Recovery Home and Community Based Services division.

At home, Mary received nursing visits, home care assistance, and respiratory therapy visits as well as occupational therapy (Randy Green, OTR/L), physical therapy (Jay Rathod, PT) and speech language pathology (Jessica Anderson, MS, CFY-SLP and Brit Austin, MA, CCC-SLP). She continued to get stronger every day. Char Combs, Clinical Director of Functional Recovery noted that Mary made continued progress in her home environment. "With the activities we worked on in her home, she is now able to integrate back into activities she was able to do prior to her accident."

When Mary first arrived home, initiation of activities was very difficult. Her therapist worked with her and over time she learned to follow a daily schedule and checklist. This improved her initiation as well as her ability to complete more activities with greater independence. She began dietary programs, as well as medication management programs, which greatly reduced her reliance on family members to complete these tasks for her.

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All in all, Mary is now able to take more of an active role in her grandson's life. She is able to go weekly to get her hair done—a long-standing activity that Mary very much enjoys. She is also able to complete some home management tasks like vacuuming and making breakfast daily. As Roger noted, breakfast is usually salmon patties!

### **The Future**

Her family appreciates how far Mary has come since her accident. Vonita commented, "If it weren't for everyone at Rainbow, I don't think she would have progressed so far."

Mary recently came back to the NRC for a visit. She walked in with energy and a big smile. Mary made her way around the NRC to connect with old friends. She was greeted with lots of "Hey, Mary!" and many, many hugs. Mary and Roger made many friends at the NRC. Roger noted, the staff, "made us part of their family."

From here, Mary continues to work on integrating back to home and becoming more independent. For the near future, she and Roger are actively looking forward to celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary! ❖

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