

Why Predicting Outcomes After Traumatic Brain Injury Can Be Limiting?

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Dr. Jane Gillett: In terms of long term outcomes, the... it's really fairly hard to predict and there's more generalities and they don't necessarily apply to every case. So you have to be really careful when you start talking about things like that.

But as a general rule, the more severe the injury the less... the good the outcome is. Having said that, I can show you families in which the child was injured when he was 6, was in a coma for 4 weeks, but because of his family and his therapy he went home 6 weeks after the... well no, another 6 weeks after he came out of the coma. And the family was superb, and they were able to work with them. And although it took them a long time, and he got into high school and high school said no, no, you're going to go through the basic program and just learn life skills; he said no, I want to get my degree, my diploma. So he came back and he went back into the general program, and it took him like 8 years to get it instead of the 5... it was 5 at that point, in Canada, and he got it and he's now in Community College becoming an educational assistant, and he competes for Canada in the Paralympics because he has a mild weakness down 1 side, and he speaks. He's like totally awesome. He was depressed, he had major learning problems, he got angry really easily, but his parents, with the support of everybody, was able to channel and teach him how to control those things; give him his self esteem back, and as he says he never thought that he was going to be an educational assistant and work with kids with disabilities, when he was 6. But he's really pleased that that's what he's doing now, and that he's different than what he was, but he's happy with what he was. And I think that's going to be the real key, is if you end up being... happy with who you are, you end up being successful. And that's true for all of us, doesn't matter whether you've had an injury or not. So he was successful.

I have another kid, same age, who was injured when he was 6 who was not even in the intensive care unit, who has not done well. And partly because he comes from a family where there isn't that kind of support organization ability to help contain him and direct him into where he needs to go. He's ended up in jail, and will probably end up in jail off and on for the rest of his life. So... just because that the first one had a very severe injury, he's ended up doing quite well.

So severity is not always the factor. There's the severity of injury, usually the younger you are less good the outcome, but there's a number of other factors - how much family and community support there is, how much do they accommodate and adjust and teach and train makes a big difference, whether you develop other comorbid problems; I talked about depression as being a really prevalent problem in 70 percent of the kids, or adults for that matter, get depressed.

Well you might expect an adult to get depressed, but a lot of people don't think of children as getting depressed. So we don't think of a 5 and a 6 year old as being... that may be what's

happening, is that this child is depressed, and sometimes the kids actually get to the point where they try and kill themselves before somebody goes 'oh, this is a problem here'. So being aware that depression could be an issue and that you need to treat the depression, if you want to be successful. Anybody who's really depressed is not going to do very well. So you need to be looking for other combinant problems. You need to be able to recognize if the child's having a seizure, and treat the seizures, so again they can do better.

You need to look at medically how they're doing, you want to look at helping the family function and cope, you want the schools to be able to learn and cope, and you want to be able to instill in that child a sense of being happy for doing what they're doing. And I think those are the factors that make you most... the better outcomes.

I think that we're starting to find ways of minimizing the injury, which are going to improve outcomes, but there's still a long way to go and there's a lot of things that can be done by families and by communities that will make a big difference to their child's outcome.