

TBI NEWS & VIEWS



CAREGIVER CORNER

You Never Have to Go It Alone | By Joe Concato



Caregiver Corner is written by Joe Concato, whose wife, Jane, sustained a brain injury in 2004. Joe and Jane facilitate the Bergen County BIANJ support group, which meets the third Monday of every month at Englewood Hospital in Englewood, NJ. For more information, please visit www.brain411.org or contact Joe and Jane at 201-666-2015.

Your loved one has suffered a serious, life-changing event and the person you remember is no longer the same. You're surrounded by medical and rehabilitation professionals, family, and friends. The professionals are telling you things you may not understand and cannot fathom. Some family and friends are offering advice and assistance. Others have disappeared. Your world has changed. You feel isolated and overwhelmed. All of this is not uncommon.

While this is not meant to trivialize your current situation, consider past experiences such as a first day at a new job or moving to a new neighborhood. You feel like an outsider. Many will approach you with advice, information, and suggestions. If you think back to these other times, you probably listened and took in all that was offered. As time passed, you made your own decisions and formed relationships with those you respected and trusted. Use the same approach to guide you on this journey.

The professionals you are working with have the education and experience. Listen to them, ask questions, but do your own research, too.

Build relationships with people who share your values and have earned your respect and trust.

They're the ones who will recognize any fear or uncertainty you may have and explain why it's common. If they use words or terminology you're not familiar with, ask them to explain in greater detail so you have a good understanding of the situation.

Pay attention to the actions, emotions, and words of family and friends. Many will go above and beyond to help you. They will listen without providing unsolicited advice. They will be there when you need them. They will give you time to be alone if necessary.

Some organizations provide information and resources for people facing similar scenarios. Kessler Institute, the Brain Injury Alliance of New Jersey (BIANJ), and the State of New Jersey Department of Human Services Division of Disability Services are excellent first steps.

Your path going forward may be very different than you expected. But there are many people and resources available to assist you. Deciding who will be with you on this journey will ensure you have what you need to navigate the future. ■

You can read more about how traumatic brain injury affects relationships and view other useful information for caregivers by visiting the Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center website at www.msctc.org/tbi/factsheets.



ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY

An Unexpected Route to Improved Quality of Life | By Caitlin Denzer-Weiler, PT, DPT, NCS



Animal-assisted therapy relies on the use of animals within a therapeutic setting to help patients achieve specific goals, such as decreasing depression, increasing interaction with the environment, and improving quality of life. Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation has six facility dogs specifically trained by Canine Companions for Independence (CCI), a nationwide nonprofit organization that raises and trains dogs to become service animals.

Kessler's CCI dogs were trained for two years prior to placement and are required to maintain special certification. These highly skilled dogs are used in conjunction with physical, occupational, and speech therapies in both the inpatient and outpatient settings to motivate patients and facilitate their achieving personal goals. Depending on the individual's needs, the dogs may assist patients with increasing purposeful movement; facilitating balance,

coordination, motivation, and participation; and/or practicing self-care skills.

For example, an individual may need motivation to walk longer distances and ambulating with the facility; the dog can provide encouragement. Alternatively, a higher-level activity may include challenging balance skills with playing tug-of-war with the facility dog. In addition, kitchen tasks can be completed, having the dog help to open and

close cabinets and drawers in preparation for life at home.

Facility dogs can also help to develop communication, cognitive function, planning, visual scanning, and attention to task. During speech therapy, for example, the facility dog receives verbal commands (e.g. sit, speak, down) from a patient. The dog's response gives the individual instant feedback on the quality and volume of their vocal command. Strategically placing the dog within a specific visual field can also aid in visual scanning if the patient is experiencing spatial neglect or field cut.

Kessler's facility dogs have had a positive impact on hundreds of patients and their families, as well as on staff. They are invaluable members of the rehabilitation team and bring a skill set that no human can replicate. To learn more about these amazing animals, please visit www.cci.org. ■



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EXPERT OUTLOOK

How Cognitive Rehabilitation Improves Quality of Life for People with Traumatic Brain Injury

By Nancy Chiaravalloti, PhD | Director, Traumatic Brain Injury Research, Kessler Foundation



There are two types of cognitive rehabilitation: **restorative rehabilitation** and **compensatory rehabilitation**. Compensatory rehabilitation usually begins during inpatient care and relies on the use of aids and tools to help patients remember things. Examples include notebooks, iPhones, and date books. Restorative rehabilitation tries to re-develop lost function through cognitive exercises done on a computer or using paper and pencil.

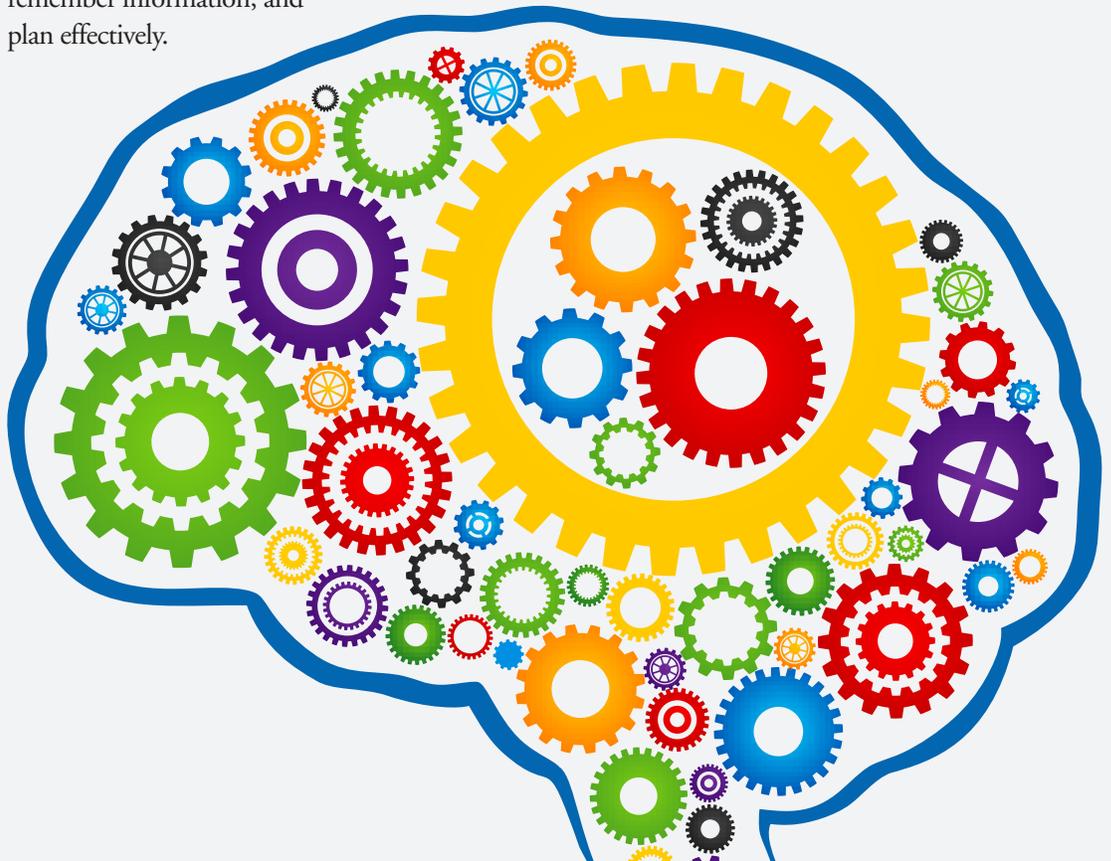
It's now widely accepted that cognitive rehabilitation helps improve cognitive functioning after TBI. Existing treatments help patients pay attention, remember information, and plan effectively.

After treatment, patients show improvements on neuropsychological testing (i.e. paper and pencil tests) and in activities of everyday life.

At Kessler Foundation, we develop and test new treatment programs for cognitive problems. *The modified Story Memory Technique* (mSMT) has shown to be effective in improving new learning and memory. We have also seen prolonged increases in activation in areas of the brain known to be involved with memory functioning after treatment. The mSMT is now available in English, Spanish, Chinese, and Italian.

Other cognitive rehabilitation programs have also been developed and are now being tested at Kessler Foundation. *Processing Speed Training* focuses on treating slowed processing speed. *Strategy-based Training to Enhance Memory* (STEM) focuses on improving memory tailored to a patient's problems. Additionally, *Emotional Processing Training* helps patients to correctly identify the emotions of others. Kessler Foundation researchers continue to develop new and innovative treatment programs to improve cognitive functioning and the quality of life of people living with TBI. ■

Cognitive problems have a substantial impact on everyday life. Several approaches have been explored to address cognitive problems following traumatic brain injury (TBI), the most common of which is cognitive rehabilitation. This consists of specific exercises to help the brain regain lost function after injury. It usually begins in inpatient rehabilitation and may extend for years after injury. Cognitive rehabilitation may be done with a psychologist, speech therapist, or occupational therapist.



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NNJTBIS Staff

Nancy Chiaravalloti, PhD
John DeLuca, PhD
Neil Jasey, MD
John O'Neill, PhD
Bruce M. Gans, MD

Anthony Lequerica, PhD
Jean Lengenfelder, PhD
Angela Smith, MA
Belinda Washington
Irene Ward, PT, DPT

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