

Challenge

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Class time: Steven Laux of Ann Arbor participates in the U-M's Wellness with SCI Program on nutrition. Group members were discussing how to best interpret labels on package foods. Barbara Schoen of White Lake listens in the background.

Public perception

During the group's fifth meeting, Dr. Cole asked participants if anyone felt diminished because of his or her disability.

Tom Hostlin, one of the program's facilitators and the father of a 10-year-old girl, raised his hand. Every year since he was shot during a robbery at a Comfort Inn in Livonia 10 years ago, someone else puts up his Christmas tree. And when a new washer that was installed incorrectly began to leak water, he felt helpless.

"You would give anything to do one of those tasks," he said.

James Randall's young daughter recently asked him how he'd walk her down the aisle when she got married. "I told her I'd figure that out when the time comes," said the Romulus resident.

"I think you need to concentrate on what you can do, not on what you can't do," said Marva Ways of Inkster. "When we feel comfortable about what we can do, we don't feel as diminished."

Hostlin, now the director of development for the Ann Arbor Center for Independent Living, said his injury has become part of his life. However, he misses the anonymity of being able-bodied. "When you come into a room everyone stops."

Projecting yourself as a competent, intelligent individual whose life is not defined by a wheelchair is difficult, Hostlin added.

"The public doesn't separate the person from the wheelchair. The discrimination has been the hardest thing my wife and my family has had to deal with. It's not something we can control."

Sexuality

Sexuality is often a forgotten or off-limits subject for front-line doctors working with people with spinal cord injuries, said Cole. Yet, people with such injuries are still sexual beings, he stressed.

Ways has been in her wheelchair 25 years. She is comfortable with her body, comfortable talking about sex, and jokes

about her "pot belly," the result of unused abdominal muscles. Group members easily respond to her. She has a sex life, she informs them.

"The doctors told us we can't have sex. Then we found out differently," she said.

At the time of his rehabilitation, sexuality didn't seem that important to Lindberg. "But now I'm a little bit more interested," he said.

Cole tells the participants to imagine themselves as able-bodied people moving into a sexual life. Most center themselves somewhere in their teen years. What kind of problems would you have had, he asks. The answers vary.

"I'm too young."

"Back seat kind of cramped."

"Getting caught by your parents."

"Being accepted."

"Getting the girl pregnant."

Getting a sexual disease."

"Finding a partner."

Cole reduces these concerns to a few basic issues: Uncertainty,

Wellness with SCI aims to reduce medical complications for spinal cord injured

What is the Wellness with SCI Program?

The University of Michigan Health System's Wellness with SCI Program is a two-year clinical trial to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of a comprehensive holistic wellness program — physical, mental and emotional — for men and women with spinal cord injuries.

Who's eligible?
Men and women ages 18-65 with a C5 neurologic level injury who have lived with their injury for at least two years. They will be randomly assigned to intervention and control groups. They are required to make a nine-month commitment. Participants in the second SCI group must call Rosalie Meyer (734) 936-7205 by Monday, June 11.

How is the program designed?

Participants in the intervention group will receive three clinical assessments — baseline, two weeks post-intervention

and four months later. They will attend six, four-hour wellness workshops that include lifestyle management, physical activity and nutrition modules. They will also take part in one individualized coaching session and receive four months of post-intervention telephone follow-up counseling.

Participants in the control group will receive all clinical assessments. In addition, a number of standardized measures/questionnaires will be used to assess improvement across outcomes.

What is the program's goal?

It is hypothesized that participants in the intervention group will experience fewer secondary conditions, demonstrate improved physiological and psychological health and perceive a better quality of life. The program will serve as a pilot study to be submitted to the National Institute for Disability and Rehabilitation Research.

Is there reimbursement?

Besides free medical attention and information, participants can get free transportation and earn up to \$225.

How is the Wellness with SCI Program funded?

It is funded with grant money from the University of Michigan Health System. However, the grant covers just the current program; there is no grant money for future programs or for continued monitoring of participants beyond the four-month follow-up period.

Donations for the Wellness

with SCI Program can be sent to U-M Office of Medical Development, 301 E. Liberty, Suite 300, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2261. Make checks payable to the University of Michigan Health System and indicate in the memo "Wellness for SCI." Contact the development office at (734) 998-7705.

fear, safety and body image. "The issues are not much different now. Standing on your feet or sitting in a wheelchair, there's not much difference. Why do you make a big deal of it?"

He doesn't minimize the problems of a changed body — lack of sensation and orgasm, incontinence and pain. Still, sex is not intercourse, he said. It's sexual versus sensual. "You must come to grips with who you are. Being able to have sex is not a function of being able-bodied."

Program researcher Rosalie Meyer said it's unfortunate there are very few Dr. Coles in the world. "There are very few resources about sexuality for people with spinal cord injuries. We talk about skin breakdowns and other physical problems, but just whisper about sexuality ... and oh, my gosh."

Economics

More than 190,000 Americans live with paralysis caused by a spinal cord injury, and nearly 11,000 new injuries occur each year due to motor vehicle crash-

es, violence, falls and sports, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The estimated lifetime health care cost for someone stricken with a spinal cord injury at age 25 is \$2 million. The high cost of hospital and rehabilitative care for SCI patients emphasizes the need for health services that focus on staying well and preventing secondary conditions, say U-M program researchers.

Also, the trend toward shorter hospital stays for acute care and SCI rehabilitation leaves little time to educate patients on wellness issues during the initial patient stay.

In other words, there is a need for U-M's Wellness with SCI Program.

Lindberg has learned a lot about proper nutrition, and the stretching exercises have helped his shoulder pain. Martin, who describes himself as a stressed perfectionist, is now trying to incorporate meditation into his daily schedule.

For Steve Laux, 24, of Ann

Arbor, a former long-distance runner who injured himself three years ago in a diving accident, the program has provided another challenge. (He has both water and downhill skied since his accident.)

"I definitely like to challenge my mentally and physical well-being. And since I've been in the chair, the opportunity doesn't present itself."

The ultimate goal of the program, said Dr. Cole, is to transfer the program's findings to the general medical community. A more complicated task may be trying to alter public perception about people in wheelchairs. However, for the well-being of everyone, those perceptions must change.

"We need other people and they need us," said Ways.

The Wellness with SCI Program will accept applicants for its group 2 session until Monday, June 11. Contact Rosalie Meyer at (734) 936-7205 or fax: (734) 763-0574.

SPOTLIGHT ON:

Orthodontics

by Josephine Finazzo, D.M.D.

BUCKING THE TREND

There are good reasons to correct "buck teeth," or overbite, other than cosmetic. To begin with, severe overbites can lead to permanently damaged front teeth, which are prime targets for trauma (particularly during sports). If there is a deep vertical curve, which the top teeth significantly overlap the bottom teeth, the bottom teeth will literally hit the roof of the mouth with every bite. As a result of these small, but continuous traumas, the gums and even the roots of the upper front teeth can become damaged. Children who experience this problem may complain of mouth pain and trouble biting into chewy foods. Fortunately, orthodontists have an abundance of experience successfully treating this, and other, malocclusions.

Seeing an orthodontist who can diagnose and treat issues like buck teeth can help to nip these types of problems in the bud, preventing later, more expensive and more involved treatment. At THE ORTHODONTIC GROUP, at 442-8885, we would be happy to discuss new orthodontic options with you. We also have a computer imaging system that helps patients visualize what the end result of orthodontic treatment may look like. Located at 19850 Middlebelt, we are available for day and evening appointments, and no referral is necessary. Look for our next article in two weeks.

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FRIDAY, JUNE 22	8:00 AM Breakfast: Pastor Mark Houten
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