



TBI TODAY

News, Ideas, and Resources from the Virginia TBI Model System

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FAMILY MEMBERS' CONCERNS ABOUT JUDGMENT AND SAFETY OF INDIVIDUALS WITH BRAIN INJURY: RESULTS FROM RESEARCH AT VCU

Lengths of stay in the hospital after traumatic brain injury are getting shorter and shorter. Survivors with brain injury are often released from the hospital before they fully recover from their injuries. They may leave the hospital in the care of family members who are unsure about the survivors' judgment and ability to live independently. Lingering problems with thinking, memory, and communication are oftentimes troubling to survivors and their family members long after hospital discharge.

Family members may worry about the survivor's ability to make good decisions and to deal with complex problems that emerge in daily life after a brain injury. Questions about ability to manage medications, prepare meals, use home appliances, make decisions

about money, and drive may also come up over time.

Researchers at VCU looked at family members' responses to a questionnaire, the *Judgment and Safety Screening Inventory* (JASSI), after their relative had a brain injury. The JASSI covers nine common areas of daily living that may be of concern to family members: 1) Travel; 2) Financial; 3) Interpersonal; 4) Food and Kitchen; 5) Appliances, Tools, and Utensils; 6) Household; 7) Medications and Alcohol; 8) Fire Safety; and 9) Firearms.

The table below shows daily living problems that family members were concerned about. The percent of family members having "a lot of concern" about specific problems is also shown.

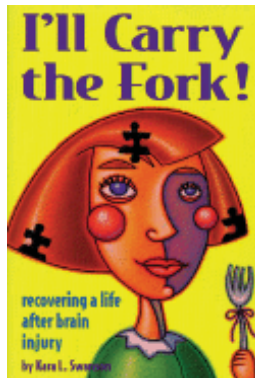
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Life Area	Common Problems	% Concerned
Travel	Reacting slowly in problem situations	62%
	Being easily distracted	58%
	Driving when tired or not alert	56%
	Having accidents	56%
	Not yielding the right of way	47%
	Taking eyes off the road	47%
	Ignoring traffic signs, warnings, or signals	45%
Financial	Trouble finding parked car	44%
	Forgetting to pay bills	57%
	Failing to record checks in checkbook	54%
Medication	Misplacing checkbook	40%
	Not taking medication on schedule	49%
Appliances	Climbing unstable objects	42%
Fire Safety	Forgetting to shut off stove burners, heater, iron, or other appliances	39%
	Leaving cooking food unattended	39%

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Family members may want practical advice to address their concerns about a survivor's judgment and safety after brain injury. Families are encouraged to seek out help and guidance from professionals experienced in treating individuals with brain injury. The survivor's doctor may be a good place to start for advice, or a referral to a specialist may be needed. Psychiatrists, doctors specializing in physical medicine and rehabilitation, and rehabilitation psychologists or neuropsychologists can often provide the type of advice a family is seeking. Family members may also contact their state's chapter of the Brain Injury Association of America (BIAA, phone toll free 1-800-444-6443) for more ideas about getting help and information about brain injury.

This column was written by Lee Livingston, Psy.D. from the National Resource Center for Traumatic Brain Injury (NRC). The mission of the NRC is to provide relevant, practical information for professionals, persons with brain injury, and family members. For more information about helpful materials published through the NRC including the Judgment and Safety Screening Inventory (JASSI), please check our website (www.neuro.pmr.vcu.edu) or call Mary Beth King at 804-828-9055 or toll free at 1-866-296-6904 to request a catalog.



Title: I'll Carry the Fork! Recovering a Life after Brain Injury

Author: Kara L. Swanson

Publisher: California: Rising Star Press, 1999

ISBN: 0933670044

Price: \$16.95 (paperback)

Description: 204 pages

"Sometimes when your life ends, you don't actually die."

"I am sitting somewhere in the bleacher seats of my mind."

"Whatever the injury has taken, you are certainly allowed to acknowledge that loss."

"That's the tragedy of brain injury. It doesn't tie up neatly in ribbons and bows. It's the guest that stays long beyond its welcome."

I'll Carry the Fork: Recovering a Life After Brain Injury is an intense read, taking readers through a roller coaster of emotions. It is a vital read for survivors, family members, and rehabilitation professionals. It provides professionals with a better appreciation of what survivors go through and can provide strength to survivors in their recovery. The quotes listed above are just a sampling of the touching words written in this memorable book.

Ms. Kara Swanson shares her personal experience with a mild TBI. She was injured in a car accident in 1996 when a minivan collided with her vehicle after running a red light.

She was taken to the hospital and released hours later. However, it wasn't until later that she was formally diagnosed with a mild TBI. But there was nothing mild about her injury.

Ms. Swanson is a humorous writer and her humor drives the book, but reading about her struggles is painful at times. Ironically, Ms. Swanson aspired to be a writer before her accident and was able to realize her dream after her injury. The recovery process is referred to as "getting on the bus," "...nobody told me that when they finished pulling me out of my car, they were putting me right on the bus." As a reader, I visualized this bus as one with no designated stops, leaving the rider uncertain of the destinations.

Ms. Swanson walks the readers through doctors appointments, tests, receiving and eventually accepting the diagnosis of mild TBI, understanding pain and suffering, grieving the loss, and learning to succeed with a brain injury. The book ends with notes from her "bookends", which she refers to as "Team Kara", the individuals who assisted her through recovery.

I'll Carry the Fork is a very enjoyable read. Within moments, you could find yourself chuckling then becoming saddened, but regardless, you leave with a deeper appreciation of TBI. *I'll Carry the Fork* is a recommended read for all because all of us have something to learn. As a rehabilitation professional, I learned even more about the perseverance and determination of many survivors and as a result, I have an even deeper respect and admiration.

Jennifer Menzel, Psy.D.