

INTRODUCTION

Rehabilitation remains a unique medical specialty that is in a nearly continuous evolution, as a natural consequence of continuing improvements in medical technology, including imaging and surgical techniques, as well as advances in pharmacology. Traumatic brain injury rehabilitation has recently emerged as an important subspecialty within medical rehabilitation. The subspecialty has grown rapidly during the last decade, especially because of technological advances that have dramatically increased the number of survivors.

With successes in acute medical intervention, clinicians and researchers became aware of a new set of problems facing persons with brain injury. High unemployment rates, limited academic achievement, disruptions in family functioning, seizures, and long term dependence were especially common among persons who had sustained moderate and severe injuries. To face this new set of challenges, existing treatment programs were enhanced and innovative programs were developed.

This issue of *NeuroRehabilitation* is focused on traumatic brain injury. Brain injury was selected as an important subject because the field is rapidly changing, the incidence of injury is relatively high, and the availability of current information has been limited. We were challenged in selecting topics for discussion in this issue and are cognizant that every important topic could not be covered. Topics were chosen on the basis of their relevance to functional outcome, the level of controversy surrounding them, and the limited availability of information from other sources.

A variety of controversial and important issues are addressed within this issue. Confusion about coma and effective treatment methods, uncertainties about the practice of cognitive rehabilitation, and outcome after mild brain injury remain topics of great debate among professionals. Outstanding advances have been made in the technology underlying brain imaging that have important promise for diagnosis and treatment. Day rehabilitation is a new, but potentially beneficial extension to comprehensive care systems. Behavioral difficulties and appropriate management are a challenge for many clinicians. Audiologic evaluation has often been neglected, despite the importance of adequate hearing in many daily living activities.

In October 1990, the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) convened a meeting of research and demonstration project directors. The results of the meeting, intended to help identify needs and establish priorities for future brain injury rehabilitation and research efforts, are described herein. NIDRR has been an especially important advocate for persons with brain injury and an important ally of brain injury professionals.

Brain injury rehabilitation is a challenging and exciting field. We hope this issue of *NeuroRehabilitation* is helpful in reducing confusion, increasing the efficacy of clinical practice, and raising more questions whose answers will ultimately benefit the field.

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