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Case Managers Become Like Family Members to Patients

This Case Management Week, we celebrate the impact Shepherd Center case managers have on patients and their families.



When a new patient is admitted to [Shepherd Center](#), family members typically come along. Whether they are parents, spouses, siblings or others, most people arrive with one or an array of relatives and friends. Sometimes, though, the treatment team members at Shepherd Center become the patient's stand-in family.

Bob Cross arrived at Shepherd Center in December 2018 after sustaining a spinal cord injury. His only daughter, Jacquie, – his only relative – lived four-and-a-half hours away in Florida and was due to deliver her second child in a few short weeks. Traveling was out of the question for her, even though she desperately wanted to be with her dad. Bob was first admitted on the fifth floor of the [Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Program](#). Shortly after his admission, Bob developed complications and transferred to Shepherd Center's ICU. When one of the nurses approached Julie Shepherd, CCM, LMSW, CLCP, and explained Jacquie's inability to travel, Julie stepped in, becoming the connection between Bob, his care team, and his daughter Jacquie, creating a friendship that has grown and deepened.

When her patients first arrive, Julie advises them and their family about what to expect. She explains

what could be involved in their rehabilitation, reviews insurance benefits, offers education, and she typically follows each of her patients through their eventual discharge planning.

Case managers like Julie are the familiar faces that remain with patients as they progress through their stay at Shepherd Center. Julie quickly got in touch with Jacquie when she met Bob, and their communication enabled Jacquie to be an integral part of his recovery.

“I was apprehensive at first about sending him so far away,” Jacquie recalls. “He’s my only family, and I was 36 weeks pregnant and couldn’t travel. I could call the nurses and get a status report, but Julie took the time to set up video calls so I could see him and talk with him even when he was sedated. At least twice a week, she would do that for us, even when he was on a ventilator.”

Bob’s rehabilitation journey included a two-week visit to a neighboring acute care hospital, where he was technically no longer Julie’s responsibility. But by then, Jacquie and Julie had formed a real friendship. Julie visited Bob in the hospital almost daily, continuing the video calls and guiding Jacquie through his care. When Julie got the news that Bob’s sedation was being removed and he was waking up, she raced over to his bedside, video-calling Jacquie, who was in labor with her daughter at that moment.

First thing the next morning, Julie was with Bob again, including him as he met his new granddaughter, Georgia “Peach” Jackson, via video call. She and Jacquie collaborated on pictures that could be printed and placed around Bob’s hospital room. At that point, Bob was noted to have an acquired brain injury in addition to his spinal cord injury and he was not speaking or following commands.

“I remember calling Jacquie on video and asking her to speak to him,” Julie says. “She said, ‘I love you dad’ and he immediately responded, ‘love you too.’ I think we all cried that day.”

Bob has recently returned to Shepherd Center for further rehabilitation, with Julie and Jacquie continuing their collaboration and what will be a lifelong friendship. Julie supports his goals of improving his word-finding and memory, and says he’s making great progress. Ultimately, he wants to read to his grandson, Jacquie’s older child, when he returns home to Florida.

“She’s in my daughter’s birth book,” Jacquie says of Julie, “She’s an important part of our family. I don’t think I would have been at peace with him being so far away if it wasn’t for her. Yesterday, she even helped set up his voice-activated phone speaker so he can answer calls by himself.”

While Julie grew up in the Shepherd family (she’s the daughter of co-founder James H. Shepherd, Jr. and granddaughter of co-founders Alana and the late Harold Shepherd,) the families of her patients are also like family to her.

“Forty plus years later, my grandfather, Harold Shepherd, remembered the people who helped him along the way when my father was in rehabilitation for his spinal cord injury,” Julie says. “As I work, I think, ‘If this were my father, husband, or brother, what would I want for them?’ It’s not always something tangible that you do, but instead, how you make people feel. Sometimes, all you can give them is a shoulder. Being a case manager is more of a relationship – somebody they can go to, somebody they can trust.”

Written by Pamela Evans

About Shepherd Center

Shepherd Center, located in Atlanta, Georgia, is a private, not-for-profit hospital specializing in medical treatment, research and rehabilitation for people with spinal cord injury, brain injury, multiple sclerosis, spine and chronic pain, and other neuromuscular conditions. Founded in 1975, Shepherd Center is ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* among the top 10 rehabilitation hospitals in the nation. In its more than four decades, Shepherd Center has grown from a six-bed rehabilitation unit to a world-renowned, 152-bed hospital that treats more than 935 inpatients, 541 day program patients and more than 7,300 outpatients each year.

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