Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Training In Haiti

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Abstract  The January 2010 earthquake resulted in over 145 people sustaining spinal cord injuries (SCI) and highlighted the lack of SCI knowledge and resources in Haiti. Anecdotally, men, women and children who had sustained SCI rarely spent more than a few days in hospital. Pressure ulcers were accepted as a normal occurrence and death post SCI was known to be within 1-2 years, many succumbed sooner. SCI specific education for local health professionals, carers and patients has had a major impact on the survival rates and many people with SCI are now living longer. There are over 300 people in Haiti (population 10 million) known to have sustained a SCI. Most of the people who sustained their SCI in the earthquake are still living. A 3 year follow up study is set for Jan 2013 to ascertain morbidity & mortality rates.

Introduction

Pre-earthquake, Haiti had no in-country resources for the emergency, acute and long term management of SCI. The influx of specialized surgical teams, due to the quake, resulted in improved initial management care. Haiti therefore had an estimated 150-200 early survivors of SCI in the earthquake and the need for acute and long term SCI specific care including community reintegration, of these patients became paramount.

As these patients were stabilized, beds were required for others waiting for orthopaedic operations. Three main sites in Haiti assumed responsibility for SCI rehabilitation care as paraplegic patients were being discharged back to tent cities with no rehab or follow up. Often there were few Tetraplegic patients. Mortality was high due to limited ventilatory support available and sporadic electricity supply.

The need to rapidly train the health workers in SCI specific care, while simultaneously ensuring patients were receiving appropriate care, was essential. It was also important to educate the patients and their carers in SCI specific care as well as helping them to adapt to their new life post injury.

Collaboration & consistency

Collaborative efforts by small non-profit organizations (all with pre-earthquake Haiti experience) led to rapid deployment of expatriate SCI multi-disciplinary teams, Coordinated by Healing Hands for Haiti (HHH) to work along side national and expatriate staff at the two in-patient rehab facilities created in northern (Haiti Hospital Appeal - HHA) & southern (St Boniface) Haiti. Medisheare took acute SCI cases. It became evident that consistency and continuity by key personnel improved education opportunities and care outcomes.

Education; theoretical & practical

The Haiti SCI Working Group was formed in March 2010, made up of international health professionals with experience of working in Haiti. Regular meetings by in-country members have ensured an ongoing collaboration for training, medication, equipment needs and has created a referrals process and safer discharge planning procedure.

A basic but thorough rolling 6 week SCI rehab curriculum to train local staff was developed and introduced by an HHA expatrapate and delivered with the support of the only Haitian PM&R in Haiti as well as expat volunteer teams, who rotated to Haiti every 2 weeks. Education combined peer-mentoring with hands-on delivered care and daily afternoon theoretical sessions.

Education examples:
1. What is SCI
2. Complications
3. Bladder - SIC
4. Bowel Care
5. Skin/wound Care
6. Sexuality
7. Psychology
8. Medication
9. Positioning & ADLs

Since then, further free education material, in Creole & French, has been created and made available including;
• Patient education (part 1 &2) booklets by HI
• “SCI care from admission to discharge, for Haitian Health Care Professionals” booklet by HHH
• Memory Stick for health professionals with all HHI SCI Protocols and Guidelines, plus above booklets

Online Protocols & Guidelines via HHH website to download

Community teams; HHA, HHH, SBF, Handicap International (HI), CBM, provided further education to patients & families in the home environment.

The first SCI Rehab Clinic in Haiti was created by HHH in 2010 and now has 110 patients registered under the care of Haiti’s only PM&R. Acute SCI care continues at Medisheare.

The Haiti SCI Confidential Database was created in March 2010 to ascertain #, demographics & assist with needs.

Results so far

A total of 50 Haitian health care professionals (trained/student nurses/ rehab technicians/Physios/doctors) undertook the 6/52 training (and sat an exam) in the first 6 months at the Haiti Hospital Appeal SCI & Rehab Unit. Patients and families participated in some of these education sessions.

Formal SCI workshops have resulted in a further 150 professional receiving training by HHH & Team Canada Healing Hands - including the first ever SCI Peer Counsellor (a nurse with an SCI, trained & employed by HHH, who remains an invaluable asset to the multidisciplinary team approach to SCI care and education in Haiti).

SCI continues to be highlighted at Government level Disability Meetings at Secretariat d’Etat a l’Integration des Personnes Handicapes (SEIPH).

A 10 week Post Registration Nurse Rehab Curriculum has been presented to the Disability Minister by HHH.

The Haiti SCI Database has 300 people registered. 145 due to the earthquake. The majority are still alive (8% death rate) and remain out of hospital.

Conclusions & recommendations

• Patients are surviving longer with consistent SCI specific education – follow up study required
• In country Working Group has played an important role in highlighting SCI
• Education needs to be delivered in local language by the trainer to reduce misinterpretation
• High illiteracy rate means Pictorial information must be available
• Nurse Training must be standardised
• RN Rehab, OT, PT, PM&R training to be introduced in Haitian Universities

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