Meet Melissa Nunn

Looking back at a decade, a service dog and a college degree

This past summer marked 10 years since Melissa Nunn sustained a spinal cord injury at age 16. On Aug. 8, 2008, she was on vacation with family in Hawaii. At a popular waterfall, her foot slipped, sending her into the water head first. She broke her neck at the C6 and C7 vertebrae, losing all or partial movement in all four limbs. After surgery, she was flown home to Thomas Jefferson University Hospital. Then, she was transferred to Magee.

“When I first got to Magee, I was scared. I didn’t know what was ahead of me,” Melissa says. “As soon as I met my care team, that fear went away.”

Melissa spent four months of her sophomore year of high school as an inpatient. Magee’s Adolescent Counselor provided a teacher to keep her on track with classes. She graduated to the Day Rehab program at Magee Riverfront and continued with outpatient therapy for the duration of her high school years.

Steadily gaining greater independence

Melissa went on to get her driver’s license and earn her Associate’s Degree. She applied for a service dog through Canine Companions for Independence and was matched with Fliegel, who knows 47 commands.

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Participants Needed

New Study to Look at SCI and Diabetes

Researchers from Jefferson Health’s departments of Rehabilitation Medicine and Internal Medicine are studying potential connections between bowel function, high blood sugar/diabetes and kidney/eye disease in people with chronic traumatic spinal cord injury (SCI). They also hope to determine the best way to screen people with traumatic SCI for diabetes.

You may be eligible to participate if you:
• Are between 18 and 75
• Have had a traumatic SCI 10 years or more
• Have not been diagnosed or treated for diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, chronic kidney or liver disease, vascular disease, or narrow angle glaucoma
• Are not currently pregnant
• Do not smoke tobacco products
• Do not currently take a statin (for cholesterol) or an ACE inhibitor or ARB for high blood pressure.

Single-Visit Study
The study requires one visit of less than three hours at the Sidney Kimmel Medical College at Ninth & Chestnut Streets in Philadelphia. It involves four separate blood draws over two hours, Streets in Philadelphia. It involves four separate blood draws over two hours, a stool test, and an interview about bowel function.

Interested? Visit spinaleducationcenter.org for updates.

Regional Spinal Cord Injury Center Research Initiatives Help Advance Care

We are excited to announce that our staff is conducting three new research studies in addition to our ongoing programs.

New
1. Interactive Telehealth and Biofeedback Sensor System for Pressure Ulcer Prevention after Spinal Cord Injury. Sponsor: National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR), supported through SCI Model System of Care
1. Characterizing the Experience of Spasticity after Spinal Cord Injury. Sponsor: NIDILRR, supported through SCI Model System of Care
2. Stakeholder Perceptions and Clinical Assessment of Cardiometabolic Disease/Syndrome after Spinal Cord Injury. Sponsor: NIDILRR, supported through SCI Model System of Care
7. A Phase 1/2a Dose Escalation Study of AST-GPCL1 in Subjects with Subacute Spinal Cord Injury. Sponsor: Asterais Biotherapeutics

Looking Ahead
Jefferson to Study C-Spine Regeneration
The Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) Center at Jefferson will study a potential therapy to promote nerve regeneration in individuals who have had a traumatic cervical spinal cord injury within the last year to 10 years. We expect to start recruiting in spring 2019.

Interested? Visit spinaleducationcenter.org for updates.

Team Members Share Their Expertise

The Regional Spinal Cord Injury Center of the Delaware Valley, a partnership of Thomas Jefferson University Hospital and Magee Rehabilitation Hospital, is committed to advancing and sharing knowledge of spinal cord injury care, treatment and cure. Through investigations and collaborations, we hope to advance the care of those we serve. Here are some publications and presentations by our staff since the last issue of The Cord.

Publications

Presentations
October 2017
94th Annual Conference of the American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine, Atlanta, GA

53rd Annual American Medical Rehabilitation Providers Association National Educational Conference 9 Expo, Chicago, IL

56th International Spinal Cord Society Annual Scientific Meeting, Dublin, Ireland


February 2018
2018 American Physical Therapy Association Combined Sections Meeting, New Orleans, LA

2018 Annual Meeting of the Association of Academic Physiatrists, Atlanta, GA
Inhornblum S, Marino R. Presentation: Controversial issues in clinical care of spinal cord injury (SCI).

May 2018
2018 Annual Scientific Meeting of the American Spinal Injury Association, Rochester, MI


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Clinical Programs & Services News

Comprehensive Outpatient Evaluation Supports Injured Workers

Magee Rehabilitation offers a Comprehensive Outpatient Evaluation to ensure optimal physical wellbeing of the injured worker. The extensive examination provides a complete, up-to-date assessment of the injured worker’s disability status and needs, so the insurer can make cost-effective decisions to update the claim.

The evaluation includes a full examination by the entire rehabilitation team, including, as appropriate:

- Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation physician specializing in spinal cord injury and/or traumatic brain injury
- Rehabilitation nurse
- Physical therapist
- Occupational therapist
- Speech therapist
- Clinical dietitian
- Wound care specialist
- Psychologist

After the examination, the team generates a report addressing the injured worker’s overall medical/rehabilitation status and any questions from the insurer, and delivers a plan of care and recommendations.

To make an appointment, call 215-587-3063.

Special Programs

Magee Outpatient Centers Offer Treatment for Incontinence and Pelvic Pain

Incontinence affects a lot of people, but nobody wants to talk about it. Magee Rehabilitation is not only talking about it – we’re helping people do something about it. Our outpatient centers are offering therapy for incontinence and pelvic floor pain.

A Common Health Issue

Many people with neurological injuries experience incontinence. Childbirth, prostate surgery, even natural aging also can cause it. If urine leaks when you cough, sneeze or laugh, you may have stress incontinence. The pelvic floor muscles are weak and need to be strengthened in order to hold back urine. Another type, common with neurological impairment, is urge incontinence, also called overactive bladder. People with urge incontinence may also have pelvic pain.

Examination, Exercise & Education

Pelvic floor exercises are often used to treat incontinence— but research shows that up to 60 percent of people don’t do them right. At Magee, a specially trained physical therapist (PT) will do an internal and external examination to determine whether the problem is structural or functional and provide education on how to do Kegels and other pelvic floor exercises correctly. Clients meet with the PT once a week for six to eight weeks.

How to Get Help

The first step is to see your doctor and get a prescription for physical therapy. Then, to make an appointment with a Magee physical therapist trained in pelvic floor issues, call 215-218-3900. To find a doctor, call 1-800-JEFF-NOW.

Independence Donates Exoskeleton Suits to Segal Classic, Magee

Thanks to the generosity of Independence Blue Cross and The Jerry Segal Classic, Magee is now able to serve even more patients with valuable exoskeleton technology. This winter, Independence Blue Cross pledged to donate three Ekso GT suits to The Jerry Segal Classic, an annual fundraiser benefiting Magee. The Ekso GT is a wearable bionic suit, or exoskeleton, that enables people with paralysis of the lower limbs due to spinal cord injury or stroke to stand up and walk over ground. Magee Rehabilitation specialists have used this advanced technology since 2012, but patient demand for use of the equipment has exceeded its availability. Ekso GT is the first robotic exoskeleton to be granted clearance for rehabilitation purposes for use with both patients who have had a stroke and those with a spinal cord injury.

Gaining Ground Helps Clients Build Strength

Gaining Ground is “boot camp” for clients who want an intensive, personalized approach to neurological recovery. Our trainers and therapists create an individualized exercise program to help each participant increase function. Clients meet three times a week, five hours per day, for one-on-one training and education at Magee Riverfront Outpatient Center in South Philadelphia.

Upcoming sessions for 2019: March 4–28 (session filled) | April 29–May 23 | July 8–August 1 | September 16–October 10 | October 21–November 14

Interested? Questions?

Contact Liz Watson at Elizabeth.Watson30@Jefferson.edu or 215-218-3913.
Mike Sullivan is Hooked on Wheelchair Tennis

Mike Sullivan didn’t enjoy playing tennis before his spinal cord injury. Today, wheelchair tennis gives him an opportunity to see different parts of the country and to meet people from around the world.

In August 1994 Mike dove off a dock at the shore and hit a submerged telephone pole. The injury left him with incomplete quadriplegia at the C6-7 level. At the time, his son wasn’t born yet.

“Magee not only helped me physically rehabilitate, they also helped me prepare for fatherhood with a newborn,” Mike says.

From frustration to fellowship
When his son was young, Mike played tennis with him, but was frustrated by trying to get around in his regular wheelchair. He didn’t know that wheelchair tennis players use special chairs to move faster.

He encourages others to get into a sports chair and give it a try: “I was hurt for 17 years before I tried tennis. I wish I would have tried it much sooner.”

Magee’s Wheelchair Sports Program includes tennis, rugby, racing, sled hockey and basketball. Players and volunteers are both welcome. If you’re interested, contact Keith Newerla, community programs coordinator, at 215-587-3412 or sports@jefferson.edu.

Mike Sullivan in his sports chair.
Support Groups

Trained Peers Provide Support for Families of Newly Injured Patients

The specially trained Family Peer Mentors in the SCI Family Peer Program at Magee Rehabilitation Hospital have a loved one with a spinal cord injury (SCI). They support families of newly injured patients by sharing their experiences and insights, practical tips and resources. The group meets once each month in Room 571.

Interested? Questions?
Contact Ruth Black at ruth.black@jefferson.edu or 215-587-3030.

Get support at Magee!
For details, contact the individuals listed or visit MageeRehab.org/community/support-groups/.

- Spinal Cord Injury Outpatient Resource & Support Group:
  Marie Protesto
  MRH_peers@jefferson.edu
  or 215-587-3174
- SCI Young Adult Group:
  Joann Rudi
  joann.rudi@jefferson.edu
  or 215-218-3912
- Stroke Family Care Group:
  Sonya Dibeler
  sonya.dibeler@jefferson.edu
  or 215-587-3180
- Wendkos Stroke Club:
  Fritz Louis-Jean
  fritz.louisjean@jefferson.edu
  or 215-587-3180
- Aphasia Support Group:
  Ashley Shapero
  ashley.shapero@jefferson.edu
  or 215-587-3484
- Multiple Sclerosis Support Group:
  Kaitlin O’Sullivan
  kaitlin.osullivan@jefferson.edu
  or 215-587-3106
- Multiple Sclerosis Healthy Living Group:
  Colleen McAllister
  colleen.mcallister@jefferson.edu
  or 215-218-3903
- Amputation Support Group:
  MRH_ambutee@jefferson.edu
  or 215-587-3106
- Brain Injury Family Care Group:
  Sonya Dibeler
  sonya.dibeler@jefferson.edu
  or 215-587-3180
- Addictions Mentors:
  Ruth Black
  ruth.black@jefferson.edu
  or 215-587-3030