

C A S E S T U D I E S

Major Medical Complications Plus a Triple Amputation: *Helping a Client and His Family Regain Quality of Life*

Background: In late 2002, Miguel R., a 23 year-old construction worker living in Stockton, California, was in a rollover traffic accident on his way to work. Due to acute injuries and major medical complications during his 4½ months of hospitalization, Miguel lost both his lower legs and his left hand. Not wanting to be hospitalized any longer, he declined inpatient rehabilitation and was discharged home. He and his wife moved in with her parents. His case manager then contacted Gentiva Rehab Without Walls® of Sacramento.

Rehabilitation Needs: “We walked into a truly heartbreaking situation,” recalls Clinical Coordinator Marilyn Edwards, RN, CCM. “They were bewildered and literally living moment to

moment. Miguel had not been fitted for prosthetics and he was using a rental wheelchair that he couldn’t operate with one arm. He had dropped more than 100 pounds while hospitalized and had no upper body strength. Because there was no money for ramps, Miguel was unsafe to be alone in the house, even for a short period of time.”

Adds Miguel’s wife Maria, “At the point that Gentiva Rehab Without Walls came in, I was hysterical—and exhausted from working and taking care of Miguel. My husband had had so many medical complications that I hyperventilated every time he tried to do anything on his own; I was so scared that he’d end up in the hospital again. I was literally having four anxiety attacks a day.”

“Triple amputee cases are extremely rare, so we did not have much experience in dealing with a case like Miguel’s,” says Edwards. “It was important that the team we assembled knew we would be taking it moment by moment. But we also knew with our Gentiva Rehab Without Walls model, anything was possible. In this case, we had to not only do home and community rehabilitation but also address all the issues that usually are handled in an acute rehabilitation setting. But it was a challenge we were fully prepared to meet.”

Says Maria, “When Gentiva Rehab Without Walls walked in, we began to have hope.” Adds Miguel, “Gentiva Rehab Without Walls got me moving in the right direction.”

The Rehabilitation Process: Like every Gentiva Rehab Without Walls case, the overriding goal is for the client to become as independent and functional as possible. In that respect, Miguel’s case was like every other. The interdisciplinary



treatment team—a physical therapist, occupational therapist, social worker, dietician and clinical coordinator—along with Miguel, his family and the insurance case manager, also established other goals:

- To perform transfers with minimal assistance
- To be able to operate a wheelchair
- To be able to get up off the floor unassisted in the event of a fall
- To be able to get outside alone and unassisted in case of emergency
- To use a telephone with one hand
- To perform activities of daily living independently or with minimal assistance
- To be independent in medical management (caring for colostomy, stump, wound dressings)
- To develop trunk/core strength in order to sit upright for longer periods of time
- To be able to spend two to three hours in the community at a time without fatigue.

“At the outset, Miguel needed 24/7 supervision so we worked to keep him safe and independent in the house,” explains Edwards. “We then called the best people in town to see about getting him a one-hand drive wheel chair and the appropriate prostheses. We were referred to a prosthetic hand specialist, and we turned the various appointments for fittings into community reentry outings where he could practice things like getting in and out of cars and maneuvering on a variety of surfaces.”

The team’s social worker met with both Miguel and Maria. According to Edwards, “She talked with Miguel about what had happened, his new

body image and his feelings about his current situation. She also helped Maria with her anxiety and gave her tools and support.” Adds Maria, “The social worker taught me to take care of myself—to tell people for the first time in my life ‘no, I can’t do that for you right now, I need a half hour to myself’ which was really a huge step for me.”

Recovery and Results: Miguel met all of the goals established at the beginning of treatment—and then some. He transitioned to walking with a platform walker then a cane. “The wheelchair is gathering dust in the closet,” says Maria. He can navigate stairs, go out into the community for long periods of time on his own, operate his prostheses

masterfully, prepare simple meals and perform transfers with minimal assists. He has returned to his hobbies of woodworking and car rebuilding and is exploring getting his GED. “He does it all—he’s amazing,” says Maria.

“What a courageous couple they turned out to be,” says Edwards. “Our team gave them hope, and the minute they had hope they could move forward with their lives. It was magical to see the progress and the look on Miguel’s face on what he achieved.”

“The Rehab Without Walls team really helped me out a lot,” says Miguel. “They got me everything I needed—from helping me get my strength back to referrals to the right specialists. Today I do everything I used to before the accident, no problem.”

**Names of patients and family members have been changed to protect their privacy.*

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