

Facing Disability:

An Internet-Based Approach to Spinal Cord Injury Education and Peer Support



Sara J. Klaas, MSW, C-ASWCM
Shriners Hospitals for Children, Chicago, IL
sklaas@shrinenet.org

Thea Flaum
Hill Foundation, Chicago, IL
tflaum@facingdisability.com



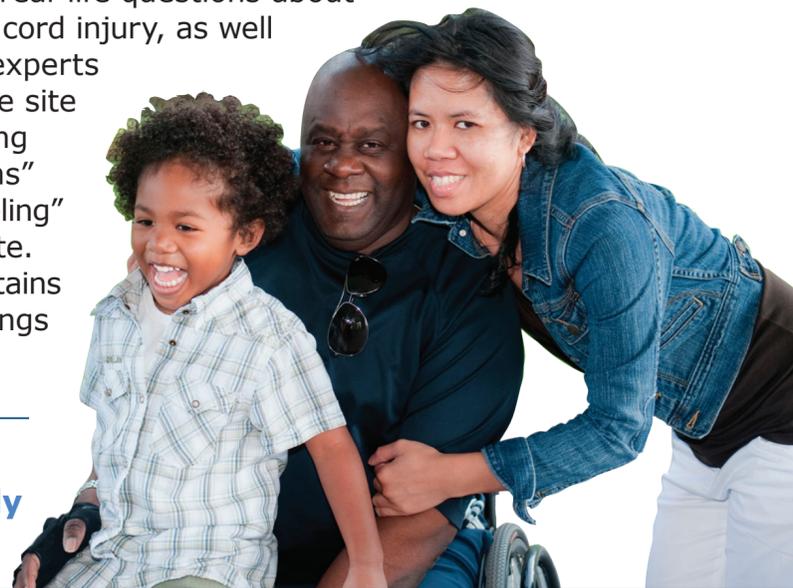
Objective: A spinal cord injury (SCI) is a sudden, life-changing event, not only for the person who sustains the injury, but also for their family and friends. Peer support and ongoing education are essential. This presentation describes the first-of-its-kind internet-based effort to provide such support and education for those affected by SCI.

Design: Internet-based community

Participants/methods: Participants were individuals with SCI, their family, friends, and healthcare providers.

Results: FacingDisability.com was created to provide internet-based information and support to people with SCI and their families. Connecting with the life experiences of others who have been down the path ahead of you often helps people find their own strength and support. The website has more than 1,000 videos of family members answering real-life questions about how they cope with a spinal cord injury, as well as interviews with top SCI experts on a variety of subjects. The site also connects families dealing with SCI through its "Forums" and by making "Peer Counseling" available through the website. The "Resources" section contains more than 300 detailed listings of disability resources.

A Spinal Cord Injury Affects the Entire Family



1,000 videos of the best answers to the most important questions

Conclusion: Ongoing peer support and education are essential components of a comprehensive rehabilitation plan. Facingdisability.com offers an important resource for those with SCI, their family and friends as well as the healthcare providers on the rehabilitation team. It is high-tech and low-cost. In 2012, its first full year on the web, nearly 60,000 visitors came to the website. They viewed about 250,000 pages. Most viewed expert videos were on Spinal Cord Injury 101, Pressure Ulcers and Sex and Fertility. Most viewed personal-experience videos were on First Days After Injury, Your Life Today and Social Life and Sex.

Preliminary results of an evaluation survey on the website are quite positive: 53% of those responding rated the website "extremely effective" or "very effective," and 61% of those responding said they would be "extremely likely" or "very likely" to recommend the website to a friend or co-worker.

Support: This project was supported by the Hill Foundation for Families Living with Disabilities, a 501(c) 3.



Shriners Hospitals
for Children™

 **facingdisability.com**
for families facing spinal cord injuries