

## Patient Stories

### **Jo's story:**

Jo, a super fit and active retired Dartmoor National Park worker, who was in training to undertake the 96-mile West Highland Way, first felt unwell when she returned home from a day out volunteering.

*"I got home, and I felt like I was drunk. I couldn't walk in a straight line and I felt woozy. It was a lovely sunny day, so I thought I must be dehydrated. I had a drink and went for a lie down, but then I started twitching and my legs wouldn't work and my husband called an ambulance."*

Jo was told she'd had a bilateral stroke on either side of her brain stem. She couldn't sit, use her right arm or legs, she could no longer talk or even swallow and had to be fed via a tube.

After three months of rehab, Jo was able to sit un-supported, got the mobility back in both arms and legs, was able to speak and swallow, gradually building up from a sip of water to her first bowl of soup.

Four weeks after returning home, Jo can stand and walk with the aid of a quad stick and has written a book about her experience using one finger typing.

Jo said: *"My grandmother had a stroke and I found her when I was 11 slumped on the floor – of course there was no rehab then and all she could do was sit in her chair. That was her life."*

*Rehab works and everyone deserves to live as independently as possible after suffering debilitation due to illness or an accident.*

*I deserved a life even when something as catastrophic as a stroke happens. Rehab made that possible and it deserves all the support it can get."*

### **Paul's story**

Paul, a motorbike enthusiast from Leamington Spa, was enjoying a weekend trip riding the infamous green lanes and trails in Devon with friends when a freak accident left him fighting for his life.

*"I'm lying on the floor. Can't breathe. Can't move. Can't talk."* Paul explained.

Paul was rushed to hospital, where he spent time in the intensive care unit after suffering a compound fracture on his C2 spinal vertebrae. In the days following, there was discussion of a major surgery to stabilise Paul's spine. Thankfully, Paul's spine began to repair itself, and his rehabilitation journey began.

Working with medical staff to build up his motor skills and regain his independence, Paul's journey so far has seen him go from not being able to take a sip of water by himself, to being able to pick up a cup and drink unassisted and touch his phone without knocking it over.

Paul explained, *"You've had the damage on the spinal cord, and you're not in control of anything, and are having to train yourself to do the basic things, like trying to sit down. Limbs feel alien - you don't know where they are or what they are doing. You pick a hand up and suddenly it appears from somewhere you didn't expect"*.

Paul receives rehabilitation services every other day but with a move closer to his hometown in the Midlands to Coventry hospital on the horizon, Paul is concerned with how his rehabilitation will continue.

"I don't know if I'll be stuck in a bed not doing anything. I honestly don't know. That concerns me - knowing it's different everywhere, not knowing if it's going to be better or worse.

I think sometimes people think of rehab for alcohol and mental health, yet you end up in this situation where you can't do basic things like feed yourself or do anything."

### **Andrew's Story**

58-year-old Andrew, a part-time farmer, was at home when he felt a sudden pain in his head. He went to the doctor and received the news that would change his life.

**Andrew:** *"The doctor said, 'It's not good news Andrew, you've got a brain tumour at the back of your skull'. He said I needed surgery, so I replied, 'Ok let's do it then'."*

The surgery was successful but after the surgery Andrew was left with a speech impediment and severe walking difficulties.

With the help of specialist rehabilitation staff, Andrew embarked on a journey to reclaim his voice, improve his speech and find his feet again.

Praising the staff who accompany him on his path through rehabilitation, Andrew has been working with medical staff to initially stand up and take his first few steps.

At first, when Andrew was asked to step in paint to record his steps he didn't recognise the importance. *"At the time I thought, that was a bit silly, but now I look back on it and I think that's just brilliant. It feels a long way now that I can look at it"*.

The rehabilitation services for Andrew are invaluable and he recognises the transformative impact it has.

*"At first I needed help with just getting up and starting to walk. I'm often wobbling around. This [rehab] support will help me get on better in life than having no support at all."*

He's now hopeful about returning to his farm even though he recognises that 'he won't be doing what he was before'.