

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURIES

People who are injured in an accident can suffer many different kinds of injuries. Among the most serious, as well as the hardest to diagnose and treat, are so-called traumatic brain injuries (TBIs), sometimes also known as “closed-head trauma.”

TBIs send more than 400,000 people to the hospital for treatment each year, three-quarters of whom are males between the ages of 15 and 34. This group is over-represented because of the lifestyle that many of the accident victims lead: riding motorcycles and ATVs without helmets, participating in dangerous sports, drinking too much, and getting into car accidents. Although the majority of these injuries are moderate to mild, even a minor TBI can cause the victim to suffer serious problems.

Difficulty Treating TBIs

The problem with treating TBIs is that they are difficult to diagnose when the symptoms are not severe (like a coma). There are often few outward signs of the internal injury with less debilitating TBIs. This has a number of serious negative consequences, both medical and legal.

Many people who suffer such TBIs do not receive the appropriate treatment. The long-term effects of a TBI can include many and varied symptoms, often related to brain function, such as seizures, headaches, dizziness, and problems with memory and concentration. However, TBIs can cause other symptoms not commonly associated with the brain, including loss of motor control, fatigue, depression, speech disorders, anxiety, sexual dysfunction, and a short temper, as well as an increased chance of getting lost or becoming agitated.

Given the variety of symptoms and the difficulty some doctors have connecting them to the TBI, treatment is often delayed or not provided at all, and the patient continues to suffer, often unaware of the cause of his problems. Even when a TBI victim has been correctly diagnosed, the variety of symptoms can make treatment expensive and difficult.

Legal Obstacles

Legally, it is often difficult to prove that symptoms suffered by a TBI victim are directly related to the TBI. Because doctors can be slow to diagnose the connection, proving that a TBI has caused the symptoms that a person describes to the jury in court can be difficult.

Compounding the problem of the doctor's slow diagnosis, many of the people who serve on juries have trouble believing that a head injury can cause so many different problems, not all of which are related to the victim's brain function. All of these factors make it more difficult for a TBI victim to win a full recovery of damages for the injury.

After the Injury

Victims of brain injuries will receive care from a wide range of professionals. Realizing the diversity of these providers is essential to understanding the gravity and magnitude of TBIs. The range of professionals who may have to be consulted illustrates the breadth of disability that a survivor must endure.

Perhaps the most important of these professionals are the neurologist and neurosurgeon. These doctors specialize in the medical treatment of the nervous system: the brain, spinal cord, nerves, and muscles. They make an evaluation, diagnose the injury, and consult on the appropriate medical care for the patient to follow.

Other professionals involved with individuals who suffer brain injuries include: Neuropsychologists, Physical Therapists, Respiratory Therapists, Speech Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, Cognitive Therapists, Educational Therapists, Vocational Counselors, Social Workers, Therapeutic Recreational Specialists, and Rehabilitation Case Managers.

Lessons Learned

If you have suffered a TBI, even a minor one, and are suffering from symptoms that you never experienced before being injured, stay on top of your treatment. While not all symptoms that a person may suffer from are necessarily caused by a TBI, the range of symptoms is great and it may take some time to get a correct diagnosis.

R. Michael Shickich is the founder of the Injury Law Firm located in Casper. The focus of his practice is personal injury and wrongful death cases.

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