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THERE ARE NO LIMITS TO LIFE AFTER STROKE

Dear OC Stroke Association Member,

The slogan of your Association affirms, “...**Because there is life after stroke.**” As a stroke survivor, please let me add: “There are **no limits** to that life.”

You are not alone in being a stroke survivor, nor are you alone in failing to recover from stroke as well or completely as you can. According to a 2007 report of the American Heart Association, the World Health Organization estimates that 5 million out of the 15 million who suffer strokes each year remain permanently disabled. The U.S. contributes to these grim statistics, as 45 million Americans have no health insurance, while the policies of millions who *do*, still limit how much can be spent on stroke recovery. On top of that, many millions of stroke survivors receive less than perfect treatment—often because of where they have chosen to live. Many stroke survivors in America are permanently disabled because they receive poor (or no) help in recovering. Stroke is the leading cause of adult disability in the U.S.

Yet these awful statistics paint what is really a false picture of your chances of recovering fully from the stroke you suffered. You *can* recover fully. In this letter I will fill in for you the positive and helpful information that many—including me—were never told after their strokes.

Because stroke is so common, there are many scientific and medical reports dealing with it. The information in these reports, however, is rarely clear, concise, or immediately usable. The ordinary person often considers it to be “noise” and ignores it, preferring to wait until well accepted, easily adopted, and useful advice—that is, “music”—emerges from it.

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When my stroke “rehab” ended in the summer of 2003, I was unable to walk, say words of more than two syllables, swallow foods thinner than nectar, see without severe double vision, or use the right side of my body. Medical professionals told me that they couldn’t do anything more for me and the best I could do for myself was “cross my fingers.” I felt like my body was a prison that I wanted out of—I wanted to be free and independent, not a burden on my loved ones—so I dove into the “noise” and found as much “music” as I could use to recover from the damage caused by my stroke. This is what I found:

Positive Point # 1: Your damaged organ—your brain—has amazing powers. It can construct a three-dimensional world from two-dimensional information. It colorizes that world based on the wavelengths of light. It detects “music” in vibrating sound waves. **Everyone’s brain has the power to recover from damage caused by stroke.**

Positive Point # 2: There are a number of forces that help you recover from stroke. We now know—notwithstanding our old, incorrect beliefs—that you can grow new brain cells. We know that your brain is “plastic”—undamaged parts of your brain can take over parts you lost. You can form new pathways in your brain to do things, and you can learn to use existing pathways more efficiently. You can thrive despite brain cell damage or losses—like the people who “should” (based on plaque in their brains) have Alzheimer’s disease—but don’t. Doctors have learned that people can lose a lot of brain and **thrive**. And we’ve also learned—and this is very important—a **positive attitude, good brain nutrition, and a focused exercise program** enhance the forces that help you recover from stroke.

Positive Point # 3: There is a three-step process that helped me fully recover from that massive stroke. There may be other paths to recovery from stroke, but this one worked for me:

Step 1: You need to *expect*, and *know* that you are going to recover from stroke. Although there is much “noise” out there about this, many researchers have found that even substances and steps that *haven’t* been proven to do anything specific *can* be effective, if people think they are effective. Some researchers suspect that if people *expect* something to improve their brain, chemicals in the brain are released and it *does* improve. Some people may argue with you if you have a positive attitude, saying you are too old to recover from stroke, or that your stroke happened too long ago for you to recover further. But I know that *relearning* something you once knew (before your stroke) is easier than learning it from scratch; I also know that *no one* maintains that someone can no longer learn things!

As long as you can continue to learn, you can continue to recover from stroke.

Step 2: You need to give yourself the proper nutrients to recover. Everyone knows that if oxygen is cut off to the brain for a short period of time, bad things happen. Similarly, the presence or absence of various nutrients in the bloodstream can have a rapid and profound effect on your brain. In the case of many nutrients, there is effectively no debate about their value to the human brain. Fish oil is good. Vitamin E is good. Rosemary is good. The list goes on and on. Pros and cons of all the various nutrients and a quick selection list are set out in the book I wrote about how to recover from stroke, *Taking Charge of Your Stroke Recovery*. You should put the best nutrients *for you* in your bloodstream.

Step 3: You need to *practice* doing those things you want to be able to do. An excerpt from *Taking Charge of Your Stroke Recovery* expresses this concept well:

“Hundreds of thousands of years of evolutionary experience have shown humans what kind of practice is successful in allowing us to improve ourselves and gain new skills. When we practice something—whether it be to learn the piano, to learn to walk as a baby, or to learn to figure-skate professionally—we are most successful when we practice **intensively, aggressively, and repetitively**. Since you want to improve and recover from stroke, you’ve got to work intensively, aggressively, and repetitively on recovery exercises, and **do them with increasing difficulty.**”

ALL THIS POSITIVE NEWS ADDS UP TO THIS: There are no limits to life after stroke. You **CAN** recover from stroke. You **CAN** help the forces that enable you to recover from stroke. While there may be easy paths to recovery in the future (like implantation of stem cells), and while there may be even easier paths to recovery today than what I prescribe (like acupuncture, which many people have found effective), what I do know for certain is this: using the “music” above, you can again become free and independent like me. A year and a half after being released from the hospital in a wheelchair and being told I would never walk again without a cane, I ran a marathon. I ignored the naysayers. You should too.

With best wishes for a complete recovery,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'R' and 'M' or similar, written in a cursive style.