

SPEAKING OUT:

THE BENEFITS OF PEER MENTORING THROUGH THE EYES OF A CAREGIVER

Mrs. Jeanette Piccirelli is a mother of a son with a traumatic brain injury (TBI) and a peer mentor through SEMTBIS for other caregivers for individuals who have sustained a traumatic brain injury. Additionally, she is an active member of the TBI community and is on several committees at the state level in Michigan. She recently attended and presented at the 2nd Annual TBI Interagency Conference in Bethesda, Maryland.

Mrs. Piccirelli was invited to be a discussant so that she could provide an overview of her role and experience as a Peer Mentor for SEMTBIS. She shared with the audience that she has contacted 12 mentees during her time as a mentor, and her interactions have included a face-to-face meeting with each mentee with the remainder of her contacts being conducted through telephone conversations. She indicated that the greatest need, as described by several mentees, was for someone with whom to talk who had also been through the trauma of having a family member suffer a TBI, and for someone to encourage them not to give up the hope that recovery might continue beyond a year after the TBI event.

Resulting from her experiences during the mentorship process, she described four key findings:

1. The telephone contact appeared to provide for the optimal interaction. She indicated that a phone conversation permits a more relaxed and open conversation flow, since it can be conducted while in a familiar, comfortable location and since there is likely to be less distraction for both the mentor and mentee that may be experienced when meeting in an unfamiliar location.
2. The mentees' primary need and benefit was perceived to be related to having an unconditional relationship with someone who could "truly understand" the trauma of seeing a loved one injured and trying to get help for that person.
3. It was rarely asked of the mentor to provide assistance in contacting agencies or others to help solve medical, legal or social problems.
4. The most important part of mentoring, from Mrs. Piccirelli's perspective, was trying to prevent the mentee from giving up hope for future recovery. She stated, "By giving up hope, efforts to help the survivor might diminish or cease prematurely."

To sum up her experience as both a spectator and a facilitator at this conference, she stated, "The amount of research going on is phenomenal!" She indicated that she is very pleased to be a part of the research.



Moving Soon?

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THANK YOU!

WANTED: Your Input

If you have something you'd like to share with other people that have a brain injury and their families, SEMTBIS staff would like to hear from you. Some examples are poetry, short stories, drawings, or pictures.

Please send information to: **Dr. Jeffrey Wertheimer**
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