

# Preface



The purpose of this book is to provide some general information and answers to commonly asked questions regarding the various aspects of head injury, particularly severe head injury. While there is no question that such an injury is a tragedy, understanding some of its facets may help those who find themselves suddenly and unexpectedly dealing with it. It became clear through our interactions with head injury patients and their families that such a reference source would be valuable. Unfortunately, the time a physician can spend with family members explaining the various issues may be limited.

This book is not meant to replace the physician-patient-family relationship but rather to supplement that interaction. By providing a source of information designed for families dealing with the tragedy of head injury, family members will hopefully be better equipped to discuss matters with their physician and manage the crisis in a somewhat enlightened manner. Head injury typically strikes suddenly without warning and with significant impact, both to the patient and the family. Family members are often left in a state of shock, filled with a multitude of questions regarding the injury, its implications, and prognosis. This book is designed to address those questions and explain, in layperson's terms, what all the beeping and buzzing from the various machines really means.

Each chapter in this book begins with a few pages of facts and information about the different aspects of head injury. We have tried to avoid being too technical, since this book is designed for the general public and not physicians. However, we thought that a

knowledge of certain medical terms was necessary to adequately explain the issues and to facilitate communication between family members and health care providers. To this end, terms in **bold type** within the text are briefly defined in a glossary of the most common medical terms, procedures, and concepts.

To avoid gender conflicts, the injured individual is referred to as “the patient” in both the text section as well as the section of commonly asked questions that is part of each chapter. Some chapters have more questions than others, with the chapters on head injury management having the most. For those looking for answers to specific questions, a listing of all the questions is included at the end of the book. These questions have been gathered from years of experience working with these patients and their families. Although it is not likely that every question is addressed, the collection is representative of the questions most often asked by families. Again, the explanations are general in nature and designed to be easily understood, but clarification should be sought from a physician or nurse involved in the care of a particular patient.

Excerpts from interviews with family members who found themselves confronting this sudden tragedy of head injury have also been scattered throughout the text. Their individual stories are introduced in Chapter 1. These interviews illustrate that no one is alone in the fear, confusion, concern, and desperation that surround these devastating injuries.

In addition to the information addressing the various medical and surgical issues of head injury, information from pastoral care personnel and social workers has been included. These professionals are intimately involved with family members as they cope with the consequences of such injuries. Regardless of a family’s religious preference or social situation, it is hoped that these chapters will add to the book’s usefulness as an informational reference. Various rehabilitation issues are also discussed.

While we realize that nothing can ever totally prepare a person for the devastation caused by a brain injury to a loved one, we hope that this book will aid family members to gain an understanding of

the issues at hand and provide reasons why the health care staff is “doing what they are doing.” Our hope is that, with this information and knowledge, some of the fear and confusion will dissipate and communication between family members and the medical team will be more rewarding.

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