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Spinal cord injury *From red lights to yellow ribbons*

Background:

Katie G., an 18-year-old high school senior and fitness instructor, was involved in a serious car accident. She was airlifted to a local trauma center and diagnosed with traumatic brain injury, C1 quadriplegia, and respiratory failure. Katie was paralyzed from the neck down and unable to breathe on her own. She was placed on a ventilator.

Physicians found that most of the teen's abdomen was ripped open in the accident, and delicate surgery was required to close it. The multiple fractures she sustained were surgically stabilized, and a feeding tube was placed into her stomach to address her nutritional needs.

Two-and-a-half months later, Katie was airlifted to a local, specialized hospital, where she underwent spinal surgery. After surgery, she experienced serious complications, including pneumonia. One month later, at a mere 96 pounds, the teenager was admitted to a rehabilitation center specializing in spinal cord treatment, located 100 miles from her home in a remote rural area.

Five months into Katie's rehabilitation program, the discharge planner investigated all the options for a safe future discharge, but problems quickly arose. Along with total assistance with transfers to the wheelchair, weight shifts, and wheelchair mobility, Katie was totally dependent for all aspects of her self-care and feeding. Even her skin required meticulous care, necessitating turns in bed every 2 hours.

Her mom was trained in her care. However, she could not provide 24 hours of care every day. Although Katie's elderly grandparents were supportive, they did not have the ability to perform care. Other home care agencies near Katie's home were unable to provide 24-hour nursing care, and Katie was not comfortable with placement in a nursing facility. Katie and her mom were distraught and praying for a solution to bring Katie back home.

Challenge:

The discharge planner called BAYADA Home Health Care, known for transitioning patients with high-tech nursing needs from hospital to home. One of their rehabilitation nurses went to the facility to assess Katie and meet her mom. "After I read Katie's medical information, I spoke at length with Katie and her mom. I set up a number of specific goals to resolve the roadblocks preventing Katie from returning home," said BAYADA Nurse Marie T., CRRN. "The greatest challenge would be finding 24-hour nursing coverage in her remote rural area. I was up for the challenge to bring this beautiful girl home, one goal at a time," she added.

Goals:

- Nurses to staff 24-hour care: a challenge in Katie's rural area
- Trained backup family caregiver in place
- Modification of Katie's home for the wheelchair, hospital bed, and electrical safety
- Reimbursement source for 24 hours of care a day
- Respiratory equipment and support
- A local physician to lead the home clinical team
- Medical equipment to meet Katie's needs
- Physical and occupational therapists with home rehabilitation plan
- Appropriate emergency plan
- Transportation

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– **Marie T.**, CRRN
BAYADA Nurse

Goals attained:

- Because of the current nursing shortage, finding enough staff for 24-hour home health nursing can be difficult. BAYADA recruiting efforts became very creative, and they elicited help from the local paper, which publicized Katie’s story.
- Local friends and businessmen volunteered their time to modify her home.
- With the help of Katie’s physicians, BAYADA clinical managers and rehabilitation nurses, insurance case managers, and medical directors, 24 hours of nursing care was authorized. Mom also set up a trust fund. The town rallied with overwhelming support and fundraising.
- The commitment of BAYADA to ongoing nurse education and training was crucial in preparing all nurses to provide safe care for Katie’s unique needs.
- A local primary care physician, pulmonologist, and urologist signed on to provide care.
- The respiratory equipment company trained the nursing staff and Katie’s mom.
- Mom return-demonstrated all of Katie’s tracheostomy and ventilator care.
- A medical-equipment company provided the hospital bed, mattress, lifter, wheelchairs, and supplies, as well as support training for staff.
- Physical and occupational therapists trained Katie’s mom and BAYADA health care professionals, including nurses and therapists.
- The emergency plan was completed; all utility companies were alerted; a back-up generator and emergency medical equipment were placed in her home; and nurses, therapists, and Katie’s mom were trained on emergency procedures.
- Katie’s mom purchased a van; the conversion was paid for by local town supporters.

Outcomes:

On a sunny day a little over a year later, Katie returned home to tree-lined streets with bright yellow ribbons fluttering from the tree trunks: a sign that her prayers were answered and she was coming home at last. As Katie rolled up to the family home in the transport, her mom was filled with joy and courage.

Katie’s mom reflects, “We had no idea how difficult it was going to be to prepare for Katie’s discharge. So much had changed. BAYADA sent an angel to visit us, bringing nursing expertise and hope that all was not lost. I couldn’t have made it without their planning and intervention. They were on our side, assisting us to carry each burden. That alone was a great comfort because the first year at home was so overwhelming and exhausting.”

She adds, “But today at age 22, despite her disability, Katie is going back to college, going out shopping, seeing her friends, and living her life with the support of her nursing team. That’s progress.”

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