

Rob's Story

Recovering from a brain injury at Blackheath



Blackheath Brain Injury Rehabilitation Centre, London
Neurological Rehabilitation Service

“ I was very delighted about my progress. I gave my best and improved ”.....

Rob is a 43-year-old gentleman who had a prestigious job and loved physical activities like cycling, swimming, and tennis. He also enjoyed hiking, having climbed to Mount Everest base camp previously. His life completely changed when he had a hypoxic brain injury due to out of hospital cardiac arrest in 2020. After lifesaving treatment at an acute hospital, he was referred to Blackheath Brain Injury Unit for neurorehabilitation.

On admission to our unit, he had significant balance problems, impulsivity and weakness making it impossible to walk or transfer independently. He presented with severe receptive and expressive dysphasia, dysphonia, and dysarthria, speaking only a few intelligible words and no reliable 'Yes/No' response or gestures. Being an intelligent person prior to his hypoxic brain injury, this led to frustration as he was unable to express himself or communicate his needs.

His severe cognitive impairment meant he was disoriented in time, place, person, and had limited attention span of only a few minutes and impaired memory and new learning.

He was assessed as being a high risk of falls, and required 1:1 supervision at all times. Rob progressed well with his treatment and rehabilitation and spent eight and a half months on the unit.

We carried out the interview below a few months after his discharge and it was amazing to see he still remembered the names of all the staff on the unit, and how they supported and nurtured his needs and challenged his performance every step of the way!

His dad was pleased with the fact that he was very engaged and excited about this process of the interview, and wrote the answers to all the questions himself in very legible handwriting and elaborated on his feelings during interview.

I was very delighted about my progress. I liked the fact that I gave my best and improved beyond expectation!

- Rob



What was the reason for your initial/acute hospital admission?

"I had a brain injury following cardiac arrest in Hampstead Heath while cycling. Downtime was 20 minutes."

What were your difficulties on admission to Thames Brain Injury Rehabilitation Unit?

"I had problems with speaking, cooking, walking, and was sometimes impulsive."

How was your care on the unit?

"I found all the staff to be very helpful. Physiotherapist Jacqui, Speech and Language Therapist Helen, all other therapists, nurses (Bola, Theona, Linda), and rehab assistant Cornelius were all very good to me."

How was the environment on the unit?

"I felt the environment on the unit was normal. Walking and talking were my biggest goals for rehab and the team helped me to achieve them. My memory was very affected as well. Staff doing 1:1 supervision were very good and very helpful especially during COVID as I could not see my family at all, they looked after me really well." Rob's dad added that: "All the staff on the unit engaged with us in warm conversations about how our son was doing. It is comforting to have your loved ones in a unit where there are people who care."

How did you spend your leisure time?

"The unit is a good supportive environment. I was able to express any concerns I had, and appropriate people would discuss them with me. I enjoyed music therapy a lot and that helped me cultivate my newfound interest in music so much that now even after discharge, I am doing music and piano lessons and love listening to radio. At the unit, I spent my leisure time doing colouring/drawing, playing games with Judith and other patients, and I always won in monopoly! Sometimes I just used to walk in the garden listening to the radio."

How did you feel about your progress?

"I was very delighted about my progress. I liked the fact that I gave my best and improved beyond expectation!"

Rob's dad reported that they recently had a community Occupational Therapist visit. They read the reports about how Rob was when presenting to the Blackheath Unit and said: 'You have come a long way!'

Did you have some leave from the unit to go home or back into the community? How was that experience?

"I was very happy to leave the unit and have a break as I had been working hard. I was happy to later be able to go home for leaves. It was very helpful to reintegrate in normal life with family."

How did you feel about discharge from the unit?

"I felt sad to leave the unit."

What were your favourite things about the unit?

"People; all the staff here are great. My therapists who helped me to be able to walk (Jacqui), talk (Helen) and cook (Claire) again.

"It was a good call from the Doctors for extension of my stay on the unit which was very helpful. It paid off to continue the progress and make good recovery."

Rob's dad also reported the use of a timetable. He mentioned that having structure to the day was great and that they have continued keeping a timetable at home as well which helps them to plan their days.