

TRAUMA CARE

Amazing Save: 2014

Anyone who doubts that the power of prayer and the support of family and friends can lead to a miracle probably hasn't met Timmy McDonnell, his parents, Tim and Clare, and his brother, Matt.

Shown: Timmy McDonnell was struck by a vehicle while crossing the street and suffered a severe head injury. Thanks to the care and expertise of the Level I Trauma Center at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital and a rigorous rehabilitation program, Timmy has made great strides in his recovery and was honored this year at RWJ's Amazing Saves Picnic.

Timmy suffered a severe, life-threatening head injury after being struck by a car on Easton Avenue in New Brunswick on October 4, 2014. Timmy, then 19, was a Rutgers University junior when the accident occurred. He was comatose following the accident and nearly died several times over the next few weeks. However, the prayers and support from hundreds of family and friends from Rutgers University and the McDonnell's hometown of Holmdel, combined with expert trauma, neurosurgical and nursing care, helped him defy the odds. Following a 25-day stay at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital (RWJ) in New Brunswick and a grueling 88-day inpatient physical rehabilitation regimen, Timmy is walking, talking and making plans for the next chapter in his life.

"There is no question that the tremendous support we received carried us through," said Timmy's dad, Mr. McDonnell. "The support we received from Timmy's friends, our community, Rutgers and the hospital is hard to put into words."

Mrs. McDonnell added, "All denominations and faiths stopped by to pray for Timmy."

After being struck by the car, Timmy's head hit the pavement. The blow caused a severe brain bleed. "We got the call at 3:15 a.m. and jumped right in the car," Mr. McDonnell recalled.

Fortunately, Timmy's accident occurred in close proximity to RWJ, one of only three Level I Trauma Centers in the state. RWJ's

Level I Trauma Center has a trauma surgeon available in the hospital 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to treat patients with traumatic injuries. The trauma center's team is also highly experienced in the response and initial treatment of traumatic brain injuries like Timmy's. The team can also draw upon the strengths of many different disciplines and in this case, it was world-class neurosurgeons, who offered Timmy the best chance for survival. In addition, RWJ features experienced, nationally recognized critical care nurses, whose daily care and support was essential to Timmy's recovery.

Timmy had emergency surgery at 5 a.m. that morning. Rachana Tyagi, MD, Assistant Professor of Surgery at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and RWJ, removed part of his skull so she could remove the blood clot on his brain and relieve pressure from the swelling.

"He was in a comatose state when he arrived and following surgery," Dr. Tyagi said. "There were many moments when we thought he wouldn't survive."

A steady stream of Timmy's friends from Rutgers and Holmdel kept vigil in RWJ's Courtyard. Extended family came from New York and many employees at RWJ and Rutgers regularly checked on the family.

The McDonnells had hope after Timmy survived another procedure to reduce near lethal levels of pressure caused by his brain swelling, and much to their relief, an MRI revealed no damage to his brain stem. Timmy

opened his eyes 21 days after the accident.

"Recovery from severe brain injury depends on your attitude and how hard you are willing to work," Dr. Tyagi explained. "The front-end support he received from his family with early physical rehabilitation at the hospital made a huge difference."

Dr. Tyagi credits seamless teamwork among the trauma physicians, neurosurgeons and nurses on the Surgical Intensive Care Unit for his recovery.

The McDonnells never gave up hope, recalling a conversation with Vicente Gracias, MD, Interim Dean, Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.

"Dr. Gracias said, 'I'm wrong sometimes and I hope I am wrong about Timmy. I want him to walk back in here, pat me on the back and tell me I was wrong, because then we will be like rock stars.'"

Mr. McDonnell still believes anything is possible with Timmy's recovery.

"Our hope is to have him return to Rutgers, graduate and live a happy, full life," Mr. McDonnell said. "Timmy's doctors said this was a miracle and the miracle started at RWJ."

Visit www.rwjtrauma.org or call 1-888-MD-RWJUH.

Shown right: Rachana Tyagi, MD, Assistant Professor of Surgery at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and Chief of Pediatric Neurosurgery at The Bristol-Myers Squibb Children's Hospital at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital, performed a life-saving operation on Timmy's brain to relieve the pressure and swelling.



The Level I Trauma Center at RWJ recently honored Timmy McDonnell at their annual Amazing Saves Picnic.

For the past five years, the Level I Trauma Center at RWJ has been hosting this family-friendly outing at Black Bear Lake Country Club in Millstone, NJ. The event is open to the public and brings together RWJ trauma patients both past and present, with the first responders, doctors, nurses and staff at RWJ who saved them. It gives everyone an opportunity to celebrate the incredible stories of survival with friends and family.

This year, Timmy and his family, along with many of his friends, enjoyed the food and fun and got to reconnect with some of those special people who will forever be a part of his life.

For more information or to see photos, please visit www.rwjtrauma.org.