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“Out of the Mist”

Dr. Welsh-Osga, a neuro-rehabilitation specialist, spoke about survivors coming “out of the mist” after brain injury. Many brain injury survivors feel “fuzzy-headed” as if they are in a fog. They feel in the middle of something but do not see it clearly. Journeys out of the mist are both painful and joyful. Different survivors take different paths and different amounts of time to recover. Dr. Welsh-Osga thanked the survivors with whom she has worked for sharing their insights and teaching her about courage and strength.

Dr. Welsh-Osga explained that it is difficult for the mind to know what the mind *doesn't* know. Sometimes brain injury survivors think they see things clearly but the “mist” skews perceptions. They are like city smog-dwellers who forget clear skies because they live most days in a fog. After brain injury, a survivor may not be able to trust his or her own perceptions and memory. It is frustrating to feel as though your perceptions are accurate, only to be corrected or contradicted by those around you. This erodes self-confidence and often makes survivors feel childish even though they know they are adults. “I’m 45 years old and I don’t need someone to remind me!” This dynamic often results in power struggles between survivors and their families and caretakers. Yet, the support and guidance offered by family and friends can serve as a remarkable compass through the mist.

Guidance out of the mist from family members and caregivers is crucial for brain injury survivors. The problem for the brain injury survivor is how to tell the difference between a good guide and a misguided guide. Dr. Welsh-Osga noted that you can’t judge a guide by his or her cover. Just because they have a title - parent, friend, teacher, doctor, spouse - doesn’t necessarily mean they’re a good guide. She suggested that a good guide has consistency, honesty, and positive motives. A good guide follows through on promises. If a guide lies to others, the guide may lie to the survivor. Beware of hidden motives. Voice doubts and see how the guide handles answers. Unscrupulous guides take advantage of the mist. They may use memory problems, impulsivity and poor judgment for financial fraud or sexual abuse. Poor guides may also have good intentions, but controlling attitudes and poor listening skills. Survivors should talk about new guides with faithful and trusted guides such as parents and teachers.

A personal journal can help a survivor gain balance and direction in the mist. Dr. Welsh-Osga suggested that survivors review their journals periodically to remind themselves of the progress they’ve made through the mist. It’s also good to share the journal with trusted guides. Journalizing can give a survivor hope and pride. A journal also helps a survivor to move on and not to linger in the mist. Sometimes survivors linger in the mist because they are grief-stricken by all their losses. Dr. Welsh-Osga encouraged survivors to keep moving forward because even more clarity will occur if they continue to ask for guidance and confirmation from others. She ended her presentation by reminding survivors of SDBIF member, Chuck Hansen’s poem, “*Recovery unfolds as surely as dawn, spreading glory on shade, bathing doubt with hope.*”