

Joel's Journey – June 13, 2016



1 week down, 5 to go!

Week 1 proved to be the most physically demanding of my rehabilitation experiences in the last 2 years. In saying that, this past week I have achieved and done things I thought may take me months of persistence. From increasing flexibility and reducing spasm in my legs, which previously required natural remedies to improving my endurance and blood pressure issues from prolonged standing.

Each day begins with an hour of stretching my legs and provoking pain reflexes to create movements. This is quite uncomfortable for me, but after 40 minutes my legs start playing the game and it is tolerable. The second hour I change to a new trainer and we work on standing and core engaging exercises. This is extremely fatiguing but I have started to feel some muscle activation in my abdomen, which is something I have not yet felt since my injury. By the time the second hour is over I begin looking at the clock and counting down the last 60 minutes knowing it is the hardest, remaining on task and doing as my trainer asks. The third hour has proved to be quite fun in that I have been put in a harness, elevated onto a treadmill or other adaptive walking devices and simulated walking. Another first since my injury.

The approach of the trainer of project walk is not to neglect or disregard limbs that do not work or parts of my body that have been previously disregarded. Trunk control and activation have been a major part of week one, this is evident

by the end of the day when I am longing to get into bed and have a snooze. Another great feature of this facility is the mindset towards remaining out of my chair for the whole session, encouraging me to constantly think about posture and activating my core. The changing of trainers on the hour also introduces different approaches and techniques which I find quite refreshing and beneficial towards remaining on task.

On a side note, for those of you who don't know, California is Americas most progressive city. I have not yet come across a shop with a step to enter, a shopping centre where there were less than 20 or more accessible car parks (on a flat surface with plenty of room both sides of the park), a door that couldn't be opened without a push of a button allowing me to enter and exit without any assistance, toilets with nothing less than a five star accessible rating, restaurants with tables purely for wheelchair users with the ability to roll under, bars with lowered bench tops for me to roll under, pools with functional chair lifts so I am able to get in and out of the water and attitudes towards wheelchair users to be commended. Unfortunately I cannot say the same for my home city, something which I endeavour to change upon my return. I have photographed and documented all my experiences here and will be bringing it to my local council to help change Melbourne for the better.

All in all week one at Project Walk San Diego was extremely taxing on my body but great for my mind. For me, mindset can make or break a session and at the moment I am in a great place mentally. Special mention to Elisa who has sat patiently through every session, remained positive when certain things haven't gone my way and has helped keep my mind where it needs to be.

Joel