

A CAN-DO STAFF AND DETERMINED PATIENT ACHIEVE AN “UNLIKELY” OUTCOME

Where do you go when you need care that doesn't fit into an easily defined, neatly packaged program? For Christopher Morey, the answer was North Adams Commons, in North Adams, Massachusetts. There, he met a caring, sensitive, and creative staff that responded to his determination to recover step by step. Together, Morey and his care team achieved the results he had hoped for—results that he and his family were told elsewhere would never happen. Today, Morey can walk on his own, because both he and his caregivers refused to believe he couldn't.

How It All Began

In 2000, when he was 47 years old, Chris Morey, a former emergency medical technician (EMT) had a toe infection. Soon thereafter, he developed septic shock. Then he lapsed into a coma. Five days later, he woke up to learn that he was paralyzed from the waist down. The combined effects of the paralysis and his 800-pound weight completely immobilized him. “But you finally realize you can lay there and die, or you can get your butt off the bed,” he told a reporter from the *Berkshire Eagle*.

By the time he was admitted to North Adams Commons on February 18, 2004, Morey had spent nine months in two different hospitals and three-and-a-half years in two other nursing homes (both of which closed during his stay). In addition to arriving at North Adams Commons with pressure ulcers and contracted ankles, Morey was bedfast: He hadn't walked in over three-and-a-half years. And he was, understandably, depressed, since his prior facilities were located an hour and a half from his home, his wife, and his son.

Setting His Own Goals

Morey clearly articulated his goals when he entered North Adams Commons: To be able to walk and go home to be with his then-10-year-old son. He hoped to live “a pretty normal life.”

After caregivers completed their initial evaluation, they were not sure if Morey's goal was realistic—but they all committed to try to reach it. Morey believes their attitude is why he can walk today.

It Takes a Staff...and the Right Resources

Morey's paralysis, weight, and other health issues required a truly multidisciplinary approach, some creative thinking, and some facility modifications to accommodate him. North Adams staffers rolled up their sleeves, got the necessary resources to provide effective treatment, and got to work. Many departments had a hand in Morey's recovery:

- Nursing tended to his overall health and physical needs, and activities of daily living.
- Rehabilitation provided physical and occupational therapy.

- Dietary made sure he had nutritious meals that met his daily requirements and helped him with a weight-loss program.
- Social Services attended to his psychosocial needs.
- Maintenance made adjustments to the physical environment, even renovating the gym to accommodate him.

To effectively treat Morey over the course of his stay, the facility purchased special equipment: a bed; lift; wheelchair; commode; four-wheeled, rolling walker; and gym equipment.

Determination and Hard Work Pay Off

By April 2004, Morey could stand in parallel bars and needed minimal assistance with ADLs. In September, he could transfer from sitting to standing, but his ankles needed to be stabilized, so he was fitted with ankle-foot orthoses. By November, he was walking eight feet, using a rolling walker and assisted by one caregiver.

In 2005, Morey achieved milestone after milestone. In January, he began to transfer independently to and from bed. By March he was walking 20 feet with his walker and met his stair-



The "Home Team" (top)
Morey with (left to right) his wife, mother, and son at his North Adams Commons farewell party.

Achieving a Spectacular Outcome (bottom) Morey and rehab staffer Daniel Couture, PTA, take a moment to appreciate what "Team Morey" has accomplished.

Stepping Out
Morey begins his momentous journey home.



To Whom It May Concern,

As I've told virtually everyone around here, this is, by far, the best nursing home I've been in. Prior to this, I spent nearly 3½ years in 2 other nursing homes, 6 months in NARH [North Adams Regional Hospital], and 3 months in Baystate Medical Center.

I came here [North Adams Commons] because my last facility was closing. Let us say that the last facility was less than honest about my condition, so when I got here, all bets were off.

The PT department was honest, saying that they might not be able to help me walk, but were *willing* to try. Because of that attitude, I can walk with a walker and hemi-walker, and will be going home shortly.

Five years ago, I awoke from a coma paralyzed below the waist and weighing 800 lbs. Today, I have partial control of my legs, am independent from bed to wheelchair and back. I will be able to live a pretty normal life. The attitude here is very good; people treat you well and handle problems.

My mom, who is 80 years old, visits me 3 days a week, and says this place passes the "smell test," and if you can convince my mom, you can convince anyone.

It's hard to express my gratitude, except to say that the facets at this place combine to create a good facility that gets the job done.

C.B. Morey

training goal. In September, having become independent with all transfers using a walker, Morey decided to undergo elective surgery to remove abdominal folds that resulted from his extreme weight loss. He returned to North Adams Commons after surgery, and after a small step backward, he began tackling his new challenges head on. By November, having completed

his upper-extremity strengthening program, he could walk 120 feet with a walker. In December, he and the staff began planning his discharge. Although he'd hoped to be home by Christmas, home renovation delays pushed that date back until January 6, 2006. On that day, he told a reporter from the *North Adams Transcript*, "I guess the big adventure will start tomorrow."

Over the nearly two years Morey spent at North Adams Commons, he completed a remarkable journey. But he wasn't the only person whose life was changed by the experience. His caregivers also had time to reflect on why they chose—and remain in—their professions. They're as grateful to him as he is to them.▲