Traumatic Brain Injury Case Study

Mary S. is a 17-year-old Latina. She is a popular high school junior who frequently enjoys weekend parties with friends, but who nevertheless performs academically in the top quarter of her class. One day, while at a party with her friends, she was dared to dive off the second floor balcony of a motel into the swimming pool below. She took the challenge and dived headfirst, but slipped on her takeoff and could not avoid striking a sharp blow to her head on the side of the pool before entering the water. She had to be pulled out of the water by her friends because she was unconscious. Out of the water, her friends noticed that she was bleeding freely on the side of her head where she struck the side of the pool.

Mary was rushed to a nearby hospital ER where she was given PET scans, which later indicated bruising and hemorrhaging within the tissues of the frontal lobes. Additional injuries were suspected. She was placed on precautionary life support. After 3 hours in ICU, she finally woke up but was moaning incoherently and moving restlessly. When examined by a neurologist, she responded to strongly presented verbal and tactile stimuli by opening her eyes briefly, and she moved her finger upon request but did not speak. During the night, her level of responsiveness gradually began to improve. By the following morning she was awake and could recognize and weakly respond verbally to her parents who had remained at her side during the night. After several more days in the hospital, Mary was released to her parents by hospital staff who advised her parents to gradually allow her to increase her activity level at home. A neurological follow-up was scheduled for one week later. At home, Mary continued to slowly recover. At the hospital check-up one week later, she was examined and then cleared to return home and continue to recover until she felt well enough to return to high school. Mary stayed at home for two more weeks and then asked her parents if she could return to school to finish out the year.

However, upon her return to school, problems emerged. Mary came home the first day and complained that she didn’t want to go back the next day. When her parents asked what was wrong, she stated that she couldn’t keep up in class, couldn’t take notes as fast as she used to, and had trouble concentrating. She complained she was having problems remembering what the teacher said. She said that when the class was given a writing assignment in English, all the other students finished on time but she didn’t. She also complained of feeling completely worn out at the end of the day, didn’t want to see her friends, and wanted to stay at home the rest of the day. As she walked to her bedroom, she said to her parents, “I’m not going to school tomorrow; I just can’t do it!” and slammed the door. She stayed in her room for the rest of the afternoon and had to be called several times before she would come to dinner. The next day her parents asked the hospital for testing and assessment, and they recommended your practice.