



Highway Horse Sense

Shriners Patient Speaks About Spinal Cord Injuries

(NAPSA)—Ironically, on the night Hillary Plog suffered a severe spinal cord injury, she was the one person at a party who was *not* drinking. She had volunteered to drive a friend home and was followed by another who had been drinking, a young man she'd known for years.

He sped up to try to pass Hillary, sideswiping her car. The impact flipped her vehicle front to back four times. She was thrown through the sunroof and flew the length of a basketball court. "I was just driving a few miles," said Hillary, "and had not put on my seat belt."

Many young people who undergo rehabilitation at Shriners Hospitals' spinal cord injury centers have sustained their injuries in car crashes. A major part of their rehabilitation is helping them grapple with the reality that they may never walk again. No matter how successfully patients make that psychological leap, it is one that doctors, nurses and therapists would prefer young people not face. This explains the hospital's growing commitment to prevention programs of several kinds.

One of the first local hospitals to have an automotive safety coordinator on staff, the Chicago Shriners Hospital has led the way in providing safe automotive seating for children with special needs. In 1999, the hospital conducted its first two car seat safety checks for the general public, helping local parents make sure their children's car seats were correctly installed.

Shriners staff and their patients with spinal cord injuries also work with the national "Think First" campaign and the Illinois chapter of the National Spinal Cord Injury Association. In 1999, these groups talked with more than 8,000 teens in schools around the state, and hospital staff and patients have provided some of these excellent programs.

The Chicago Shriners Hospital has also worked closely with



Confined to a wheelchair, Hillary Plog speaks about the dangers of drinking and driving.

experts in spinal cord injury rehabilitation at the Shriners Hospitals in Philadelphia and Northern California to develop printed educational materials for teens on spinal cord injury prevention.

Hillary, now majoring in art at Barat College in Lake Forest, IL, has become active in Shriners' efforts to educate the public, both in creating the new educational materials and in speaking engagements on the tragic results of drinking and driving. In talking to other teens about her experience, she hopes she can make a difference. "What most people need to realize is that they must be prepared for other people who are not doing the right thing. Everything can change in an instant," she said.

For more information on Shriners' network of 22 hospitals that provide free treatment to children with orthopaedic problems, burns and spinal cord injuries, write to: Shriners International Headquarters, Public Relations Dept., 2900 Rocky Point Dr., Tampa FL 33607, or visit the Web site at www.shrinershq.org.

If you know a child Shriners can help, call 1-800-237-5055 in the United States or 1-800-361-7256 in Canada. Shriners Hospitals provide free treatment to children under age 18 without regard to race, religion or relationship to a Shriener.