



VA provides coverage for spinal cord injuries

Spinal cord injuries and disorders are often severely debilitating, leaving those stricken with having to endure significant pain on a daily basis. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides care for eligible veterans with spinal cord injuries or disorders even if the problem is not related to military service.

The VA will serve patients with traumatic spinal cord injuries caused by accidents such as motor vehicle crashes or falls, and disorders that are non-progressive (not getting worse) and impair mobility or daily living. This is a general description of eligibility; for details, go to sci.va.gov.

Rosemarie McIlduff saw firsthand the help that VA can provide for spinal cord injuries and disorders. In 2013, McIlduff, a retired letter carrier from Salem, OH, was living at Nalcrest with her husband James, also a retired carrier, when James developed a cervical spine tumor. Within months, the Youngstown, OH Branch 385 member's right side was paralyzed and he became wheelchair-bound. Rosemarie cared for him round the clock, but the bills for treatment and equipment piled up.

"We became desperate," McIlduff said, "having gone through tens of thousands of dollars out of pocket."

Then the couple learned from a fellow letter carrier about VA's spinal cord injury support. James had worked on nuclear submarines during his military service in the in the Navy. His tumor might have been connected to exposure to radiation on the job, yet establishing that it was related to his service could have taken years. But since support for spinal cord injuries and disorders does not require a link to military service, James was able to get help immediately.

James received treatment and rehabilitation at both the Cleveland, OH, VA spinal cord unit in his home state and at the Tampa, FL, VA spinal unit. "The care and the rehabilitation provided were excellent," Rosemarie said.

Unfortunately, the tumor grew and James died in June of 2015 after a stay in hospice care in the Tampa VA facility.

"Without the VA, we would have lost everything," McIlduff said. "Even with good insurance, you can't imagine the expenses—daily supplies, adaptive home modifications, physical therapy, pain management.

"And, although it was bad," she added, "it would have been so much worse if not for the care and commitment of the VA."

Rosemarie contacted *The Postal Record* to publicize this benefit to help other veterans with spinal cord conditions. "I try to spread this little-known information far and wide," she said. "I will always be a positive spokesperson for the VA. They are amazing."

For more information about spinal cord injury and disorder care provided by VA or to apply for benefits, visit sci.va.gov.



Right: James McIlduff with wife, Rosemarie
Below: McIlduff served on nuclear submarines while in the Navy.

