

Optimism catalyst for patient's recovery

Garey Seger felt his life was moving in the right direction. In November 2006, he remarried and with his new wife, Twila, created a blended family with six children under the age of 18 in Fremont, Neb. Garey was anxious to provide a loving, comfortable environment for his family and was looking forward to his first day of work at Valmont Industries in Valley, Neb.

Garey worked that morning in an area of the plant that manufactured galvanized light poles. The poles are immersed in a vat of chemicals heated to more than 870 degrees. One of the poles being lifted from the vat exploded, showering Garey and a coworker with a chemical bath. He sustained burns to 60 percent of his body. His head was spared injuries due to his safety equipment.

Garey was life-flighted to the burn unit at St. Elizabeth's Regional Medical Center in Lincoln. His injuries required several amputations, including his left leg below the knee, three fingers on his right hand, right toes, and partial right foot. He endured skin grafting surgeries, plus a tracheostomy and colostomy. During his hospital stay, Garey suffered a heart attack and two strokes, leaving his left side weakened and flaccid. He battled on through bouts of pneumonia and sepsis.

Upon admission to Madonna on June 26, 2007, Garey was unable to move by himself. "I decided to set a goal to be as self-sufficient as possible," Garey said. "The entire Madonna staff, including nurses, aides and therapists, have offered daily encouragement." Moving his arms to shave, combing his hair and feeding himself were goals that he reached with aggressive therapy. "I would be immobile today if it weren't for the therapists pushing me just a little bit more each session," Garey shared. He was able to have his tracheostomy removed two weeks ago and learned to maneuver his motorized wheelchair.

Regular visits from Garey's family bolster his spirits greatly. He also has mastered using the speaker function on his cell phone to stay connected. Habitat for Humanity is building a new wheelchair-accessible home for the Seger family. He will have a wheelchair assisted van waiting for him and a new wheelchair is being made to his body specifications.

Garey's expected release date is August 15 and he's making plans to return to Madonna weekly as an outpatient. "I've heard it's common for people with amputations to lose the will to live. That's never going to happen to me. I've come so far," Garey reflected, "and it's due in a large part to the love and support of my Madonna staff."



Patient Garey Seger (center) works through his therapy with Madonna staff Lesa Lucke, rehabilitation associate therapy aide, and Scott Fandrich, inpatient physical therapist.