

## NEWS RELEASE

*For immediate release*

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### **Soldier's message one of hope to other injured troops**

*Lincoln, NE* – Mack Richards penned a plea on his hand so he wouldn't forget to tell his doctor: He wanted to go home for care.

The Nebraska Army National Guard sergeant suffered a mild traumatic brain injury while serving in Iraq when an enemy propelled grenade exploded within 25 feet of him. Richards' difficulty putting thoughts into sentences and memory recall are two common side effects among brain-injured troops and patients.

Richards shared his experience with U. S. Sen. Ben Nelson (D-NE) and others during Nelson's visit to Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital in Lincoln, Neb. on April 4.



“We were under rocket attack and one (rocket) exploded 20-25 feet from my position. I heard it come in,” said Richards, “but I couldn't get out of the way fast enough.” Along with his brain injury, Richards injured a wrist and ankle.

After what Richards called superb immediate care at a military hospital in Balad, Iraq, the sergeant returned to the U.S. where the care he received was “disappointing and unacceptable,” according to Gen. Robert Bailey, deputy adjutant general for the Nebraska National Guard. “He spent three months without treatment at all,” said Bailey.

“With some brain injuries, like Mack's, there are not open wounds or visible injuries, but many troops are wounded by the loud explosions,” explained Nelson, Democratic member of the Senate Armed Services Committee and chairman of its military personnel subcommittee. “Because of the increasing instances of these types of injuries during this war in Iraq, the military is only now learning about these types of cases. Madonna is ahead of the learning curve on this issue, which is why we want to establish this partnership between the military, Veterans Affairs Hospitals and private rehabilitation hospitals like Madonna,” Nelson said.

It wasn't until a military appointed nurse case manager assumed Richards case that he made his way to Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital in Lincoln, Neb. “It's my hope that those who can, if

there's a way, will come to a facility like this," Richards said. "My care has been superb here. I've made great progress and the staff has been amazing," he added.

Sen. Nelson and Gen. Bailey gained first-hand experience of Madonna's technical expertise by using two technical assistive devices. Sen. Nelson communicated, "Vote for Ben Nelson," through the ERICA Eye Gaze System, while Gen. Bailey shared greetings via the AccuPoint Head Tracking System. Both devices enable people with very limited mobility to communicate using computer-aided technology.

Madonna is prepared to create a partnership between the military and congressional leaders, according to hospital officials. "Madonna is a regional leader in rehabilitation and treatment of brain injuries and has been working with these kinds of patients for more than 25 years. We want to be able to extend that complete care to our troops," said Marsha Lommel, president and CEO of Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital.

Nelson and Bailey agreed that troops deserve the kind of care provided at Madonna and similar facilities. "Going to a facility that just offers therapy will not give troops adequate care. They need complete rehabilitation. The special care is available, we just have to make it accessible," said Nelson. "We need to establish a connection between the military and rehabilitation hospitals. It's the right thing to do, and we're going to make sure it happens."

Bailey added, "We are very happy Sgt. Richards has found his way here. Our main interest is to get him the best possible care. The fact is that for brain injuries this kind of quality care is not available at the military facilities. For Sgt. Richards to have the kind of facility that specializes in this kind of care close to home is wonderful. An important part of his recovery is to be with his family."

For Richards, Nelson, Bailey and Lommel, the responsibility is clear—brain-injured troops deserve immediate comprehensive care. "It will take a partnership between the military, congress and rehabilitation providers," said Lommel. "We are all trying to make that happen."

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*Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital provides a complete range of inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation for patients of all abilities. Through highly specialized programs and services, Madonna offers individualized treatment and support to help every patient heal in mind, body and spirit – and ultimately live life to the fullest. Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital is located at 5401 South Street in Lincoln, Nebraska, 68506; 402-489-7102; [www.Madonna.org](http://www.Madonna.org).*