



MEMORANDUM

TO: Chartered State Affiliates
FROM: Susan H. Connors, President and CEO
DATE: March 23, 2005
RE: Response to Terri Schiavo's Case

Simply put, we all ache for Terri Schiavo and those who love her. We cannot reverse what happened to her, nor can we presume to know what her explicit wishes may have been or what her current long-term prognosis may be. Therefore, the Brain Injury Association of America has not and will not comment on Mrs. Schiavo's state of impaired consciousness, sometimes referred to as "persistent vegetative state."

The Association stands firm in its position that end of life decisions are deeply personal and should be made by loved ones in consultation with medical professionals, spiritual counselors, and others who have knowledge of the particular facts and circumstances. The role of the Brain Injury Association in Mrs. Schiavo's life and in the lives of millions of others is to prevent heartache when we can, and when we cannot, to let individuals and families know they are not alone.

To that end, the Brain Injury Association of America urges everyone to prepare an advance directive to help alleviate some of the anguish experienced by surrogate decision makers. Through our National Brain Injury Information Center and the nationwide network of Affiliate websites and helplines, we offer information, resources and support to anyone who is facing a distressing situation as a result of brain injury.

While Mrs. Schiavo's private struggle has unfolded as a public drama, estimates suggest as many as 30,000 to 45,000 other people are currently in a state of impaired consciousness. Every year, 1.4 million Americans incur a traumatic brain injury (TBI), and one in ten TBIs may be severe enough to result in prolonged unconsciousness or coma. On behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves, the Brain Injury Association of America calls on its Chartered State Affiliates to educate The White House, Members of Congress, state legislators, and the media about the silent epidemic of TBI.

Our nation has committed vast resources to saving lives through the science of medicine. Now is the time for lawmakers and opinion leaders to commit equal resources to maximizing the quality of life for the people who are saved. We know that at least 5.3 million American men, women and children live with a TBI-related disability as a result of falls, motor vehicle crashes, assaults, and sports-related incidents. We also know that blast brain injuries—a signature of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan—will further swell those ranks.

The Association asks Chartered State Affiliates to help the public understand that individuals who incur brain injuries need access to a set of services that include immediate emergency response, expert acute treatment, specialized rehabilitation, and physically and cognitively-accessible community-based supports. We ask you to help the public understand that third party payments and private settlements are often inadequate to meet what can be lifelong service and support needs.

Like our affiliates and their members, the Brain Injury Association of America is perplexed by the Administration's zeroing out of \$9.375 million for TBI from the Health Resources and Services Administration's budget and the sharp cuts in Medicaid when juxtaposed against the race to prolong the life of Terri Schiavo. We encourage advocates to seek an explanation from The White House for these seeming contradictions.

Most importantly, we strongly recommend Chartered State Affiliates use the spring recess to submit personalized letters to the editors of your local newspapers to thank your Members of Congress who signed the Resolution declaring March as Brain Injury Awareness Month, commend those who have joined the Congressional Brain Injury Task Force, and implore all federal legislators to move as swiftly on reauthorization of the TBI Act as they did on the Terri Schiavo legislation. (The lists of Resolution signers, Task Force members, and a record of Schiavo bill votes are attached to this memorandum).

By speaking in unison, we can and will create a better future. Thank you.