

CLINICAL ADULT CASES

The Case of Mr. Diaz

Antonio E. Puente, PhD, and Gabriel D. Salazar, BA

Mr. Diaz is a 25-year-old Mexican male quadriplegic confined to a wheelchair as a result of a work-related accident in which he fell out of a tree. He is unable to meander without the assistance of this machine. However, he is very adept at it. Mr. Diaz's history, clinical evaluation, and cultural issues will be discussed in further detail.

Mr. Diaz was born in rural Mexico to a semiliterate farmer and an illiterate seamstress. As a child, he did not learn to walk until he was almost 2 years old. Mr. Diaz did not like school and was not a particularly good learner. Although he can read and write (in Spanish only), he terminated school in the fifth grade. Mr. Diaz then began to work and began working full time around the age of 15 at a car assembly plant as well as in construction.

Mr. Diaz has been in the United States for 4 years, working primarily as a construction worker. His mother came a year ago to help him after the accident. Up until about 3 months before the accident, Mr. Diaz was a copious consumer of alcohol, drinking on a regular daily basis. He is one of 12 siblings, with 5 brothers and 6 sisters. They are all unskilled laborers. Two of his brothers are deceased, one of diabetes and the other in a motor vehicle accident. Five of his other siblings live in the United States. They all apparently have a good relationship.

An interview was conducted with Mr. Diaz's primary caregiver (his youngest sister), and she said that his behavior is very erratic. Sometimes he wants to leave the house, and other times, he just wants to sleep. She says he is also paranoid about other people's intentions and is disoriented as to time and location. She also noted that he spent 4 months in a nursing home where he did not receive adequate care. Mr. Diaz's mother added that he forgets things very easily and repeats himself regularly. It is also difficult for him to make decisions and needs others to assist him.

Mr. Diaz recalled how bad life has been since the accident. It is interesting that he talks more about his traumatic response to the events that have occurred since the accident rather than the accident itself. He describes in vivid detail how terrible it was to be in the nursing home where people ignored his requests for different kinds of assistance or how they inadvertently dropped him on the floor for an extended period of time and how they did not make an effort to try and deal or understand his requests or demands. He seemed traumatized by the event and continues experiencing difficulties in adjusting to limitations associated with his current situation

at home. He says he is extremely depressed from staying at home and does not know what to do. The insurance company is handling his care, and Mr. Diaz is having trouble understanding how Workmen's Compensation and rehabilitation work.

Mr. Diaz's diagnosis is depression superimposed on closed head injury. He attends for only small amounts of time, and his vocabulary is very limited. He has difficulty handling the demands of his situation. As a consequence, most people, including his family, do not realize how complicated life is for him.

Mr. Diaz presents a rare case in that he is quadriplegic. Not only is he unclear about the Worker's Compensation system, he is also having trouble understanding his legal case, rehabilitation, and intervention. These factors, coupled with the fact that neither he nor his family speak English, make his case even more complicated.