

Katie Johnson: Good morning and welcome to Apple a Day Lake Region Healthcare's Health and Wellness show where we feature news and information you can use to live a healthier life. I'm Katie Johnson, your host, and I have two guests with me today, Bonnie Franklin and Jacque Mortenson, the director and co-director of the Brain Injury Collaborative of West Central Minnesota. Good morning ladies.

Bonnie & Jaque: Good morning.

Katie Johnson: Thank you for joining me today. I became aware of this collaborative several months ago and have seen that you've been active in getting people together around the topic of brain injury and then recently became aware of a new monthly Lunch and Learn series for people with brain injury that we want to talk about today. So thanks for joining me to just share more about this topic and what you're doing as a collaborative to help improve the awareness of brain injury and its impacts and prevention and all those other important messages that we want to share with our listeners today.

Let's start talking about the collaborative in general and give us a little bit of history of how it started and why.

Bonnie Franklin: The collaborative started in 2017 as a result of a brain injury that I experienced. After having spent time in the hospital dealing with a brain bleed that came with it I realized that this was not like having a sore throat. It wasn't just going to go away. So I started looking for resources and I created a treatment team to help me through that. One of the first people I chose to work with after doing some research was Tammy Stanislawski, a speech therapist here. I didn't know Tammy but I had called the department and said I would like to have an appointment with the person who's worked with brain ... Who has most experience with working with brain injured people. Tammy and I spent 32 sessions finding out that yes, although I could talk, I didn't always make sense.

She became part of our collaborative eventually representing Lake Region Healthcare as part of our collaborative. Tammy helped me understand that there were other forms of treatment that would be helpful to me as well. We don't have like one primary department or one go-to person in the healthcare community that brain injured person or their family members can go to and say well what do I do? Where do I start? Can I eat this? Can I do that? You know, whatever. That's like ... Well, let's talk about that. We decided the collaborative was a way to help others find people to talk to.

We really focus on providing education, awareness, referrals, just letting people know what's available in our community because we have a lot of support and a lot of professionals who do understand brain injury in our community and they're very helpful. Just helping people find them is what we're trying to do.

- Katie Johnson: I think it's fantastic to have that central resource, especially when brain injury itself is such a complex issue and maybe that's where we should go next is maybe helping people understand what is a brain injury? Sometimes you hear it referred to as TBI, traumatic brain injury. How do you define that? What can be defined as a cause or how does someone know I have a brain injury or a traumatic brain injury?
- Jacque Mortenson: You can get a concussion, which is one of the TBIs ... considered a traumatic brain injury ...but we also have many causes like falls, strokes, aneurysms, disease, tumors, meningitis, toxic exposure, just to name a few. But there's multiple types of brain injuries out there.
- Katie Johnson: Sure, I think that's a common misconception that concussion and brain injury are synonymous, that concussion is the only type of brain injury. But as you mentioned, there's so many different possible ways that someone can end up dealing with the consequences of brain injury.
- Let's talk a little bit about this monthly brain injury Lunch and Learn support group. Where is it held and those kinds of details, but more importantly who should attend and what can they expect when they attend that monthly series?
- Bonnie Franklin: Lunch and Learn is held the first Tuesday of every month and is from 12:00-1:00. The next meeting will be on Tuesday, June 4th. Tammy Stanislawski and I facilitate this Lunch and Learn group. During the hour that we meet together with people and people are welcome to come at whatever time their lunch hour comes into that timeframe. The idea is that we have a topic every month and we focus on the topic for part of the session and it will be about, of course, about traumatic brain injury, and care for the caregiver, what resources are there for the person with the TBI? What might be some of the needs of the family? Or maybe they have questions about how does the school work with students who have TBIs? We just have a variety of topics that we deal with monthly. And we leave part of the session as a time for people to ask questions and discuss whatever things that they might want or have on their mind and they might want to share or ask others about.
- Katie Johnson: So it sounds like it would be open to caregivers as well and a good resource for them as well.
- Bonnie Franklin: Grandpas, grandmas, aunts, uncles ...
- Katie Johnson: Anyone wanting to learn more and how to deal more effectively. Do you have any other events that the collaborative has in the works now? I know you've hosted some other events. Are there things that you're working on or hoping to accomplish in the coming months as a collaborative?

Bonnie Franklin: Well, one of the first things that I became aware of as I was searching for help with when I was diagnosed with my brain injury was I came into contact with the Minnesota Brain Injury Alliance. I found the staff there as we talked on the phone to be very helpful, spending an hour at a time just helping me define what are ... What were some of the problems I was having, what resources did I have in my community, what would be available in terms of education? And as we started the collaborative in 2017 and as we've grown we've included more and more of those resources like from the Minnesota Brain Injury Alliance, from the Low Incidence Project, and that has been a really big help to our school system.

The Low Incidence Project is a project that the point of it is to help students and teachers when there's been a brain injury to a student learn how to deal with that in terms of when are they okay to play in the sport again, if it's been a sports-related injury and when are they ready to learn again. Because that is a field where not a lot of work has actually been done and most school systems are not aware of this free help that's out there. So we've brought speakers from both those groups to our community. And we have plans to do more with both of those groups.

Katie Johnson: Great. You mentioned earlier that it's not like a sore throat or a headache that goes away. Let's talk a little bit more about what that looks like. I imagine it's unique for everyone, but maybe are there some common things that you need to learn to manage and to deal with?

Jacque Mortenson: Lots of the symptoms from a brain injury could be like headaches, dizziness, light sensitivity, nausea, mood swings, different slurred speech, vision changes. A lot of vision changes are very common. Lack of sleep is probably one of the biggest changes. Then dealing with people that have a brain injury or concussion, if they don't get that sleep it's going to affect them everywhere they go.

Katie Johnson: Right.

Jacque Mortenson: Especially with learning, children in the classroom.

Katie Johnson: I was going to say - talk about a barrier to learning, not having enough sleep's a big one right there. I can imagine that that's one of the benefits of getting together both as your collaborative and in the Lunch and Learns is being able to share with other people who understand what it's like to experience that and learn tips from each other about what works.

Bonnie Franklin: Oh, yeah, very definitely. I had a woman call me not too long ago. I didn't know her but she had had an illness that left her with brain injury type symptoms. Just being able to as I'm talking about the ... The talking to each other about what we're experiencing in terms of symptoms, just the gratitude and the relief that

each of us would feel as we said oh, you understand. I don't have to explain to you why I'm tired all the time. Or I don't have to explain to you why I can't remember what I just said... You just told me your name, you know. I mean family members and friends are very helpful, but it's a different experience to actually have the injury.

I think what research tells us is that most concussions or brain injuries will heal in a relatively short time with very few side effects. However, if you think it's one out of every ten people that's going to have a problem, for example, that one person needs a number of resources and for that person, it's a journey that's very complicated and it doesn't just mean medication. It does mean support, getting help for the family, maybe for employers to understand.

Jacque Mortenson: I think that's what I wrote in our latest newsletter is the hardest thing for a TBI is to understand what it is and what they're going through and to educate yourself and educate the person that has the TBI so they understand because they'll go through anxiety or depression.

Katie Johnson: Are you looking for people to become more involved in the collaborative itself? And if so, where can people go to learn more and what kinds of roles might you be looking for people to play?

Bonnie Franklin: I would say that come one, come all. We welcome everyone and we look forward to meeting people who are looking for some of the resources because that helps us grow as a collaborative. People can have a role that if they would like to become part of the events that we do or help us facilitate any of the programming, sometimes just having another person to give us ideas and become aware of what we're doing. Everyone seems to find their own role eventually because we have new people joining all the time. They pretty much can define what their interest is and then we can use their strengths.

Katie Johnson: Absolutely, and Jacque, you put out the newsletter. If someone's interested in getting on that distribution list is there a good way for them to get signed up?

Jacque Mortenson: Yeah, they can just go ahead and email us at-

Bonnie Franklin: B-I-C-W-C-M-N@gmail.com. I'll say that again. B-I-C-W-C-M-N@gmail.com. Brain Injury Collaborative of West Central Minnesota.

Jacque Mortenson: Or they can find us on Facebook and let us know through that.

Katie Johnson: Perfect. Well, Jacque and Bonnie, thank you for joining me today. Thank you for the work that you're doing to improve the education and information that's available to our community about brain injury. Appreciate the work of the collaborative and invite everyone to the monthly Lunch and Learn the first Tuesday of every month in the lower level conference room at Lake Region

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Healthcare. Enter through the hospital entrance and take the elevator down one level. We'll have all those details available on our website for you as well.

Thank you, again, for joining me and for your work on this important topic.

Bonnie Franklin: Thank you for the air time.

Katie Johnson: Bonnie Franklin and Jacque Mortenson, director and co-director of the Brain Injury Collaborative of West Central Minnesota, my guests today on Apple a Day. Bonnie, Jacque, and Katie remind you there is so much to do here, stay healthy for it. Have a great day.