

DISORDERS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

What is a Disorder of Consciousness?

- A **disorder of consciousness (DOC)** is a diagnosis given when someone has difficulty maintaining wakefulness and/or has impaired awareness of their environment due to a medical condition, like a brain injury.
- Consciousness is the state of being awake and aware of one's surroundings.
- There are 3 states of consciousness: **Coma, Vegetative State (Unresponsive Wakefulness Syndrome), Minimally Conscious State.**
- The **Rancho Los Amigos Scale** is used to assess individuals emerging from a coma.

Coma

- There are no signs of wakefulness or signs of responsiveness when in a coma.
- Eyes remain closed, no response to any stimuli, and no movement.

Vegetative State (Unresponsive Wakefulness Syndrome)

- Individuals will have periods of wakefulness and generalized responses to stimuli which are reactions that happen due to reflexes or automatically. These responses are not purposefully controlled by the individual.
- You may notice an individual has open eyes and is responding to stimuli, involuntarily.

Minimally Conscious State

- Individuals will have periods of wakefulness and purposeful responses to stimuli that shows they are gaining awareness to what is going on around them.
- You may notice an individual has open eyes for longer periods of time, are responding to pain and discomfort, following simple 1-step instructions and answering yes/no questions inconsistently or incorrectly.

How to Advocate for an individual diagnosed with a Disorder of Consciousness

- You are a VERY important part of the treatment team, be as involved as you are able to be and ask questions. It is also important to share the goals that you have for your loved one as they heal.
- Share what your loved one enjoyed and their personality prior to the injury so that those things can be integrated into their care. Music, sports, art, their family members including children, were they a lively upbeat person or were they a reserved quiet person?
- Learn about your loved one's care. It may be necessary to learn how to use a catheter, bath them or administer medications.
- There are specialized DOC facilities that treat individuals with Minimal Conscious State, reach out to our helpline for more information.

