



Confronting concussions head on

West Island teen credits the MCH Trauma Centre's mild Traumatic Brain Injury Program for her recovery — By Pamela Toman

It happened in just a split second – not once, but twice. Colleen Lobo, now 18, says while her memories of her concussions during high school are a bit fuzzy and both of them happened very differently, the aftermath felt remarkably familiar.

“If you’ve never had a concussion before, it’s hard to understand what it feels like,” she explains. “A constant headache, loss of focus and concentration, dizziness, nausea, disorientation, sensitivity to light and noise...it really feels like you’re completely out of it.”



Colleen Lobo

Two concussions two years apart

Colleen’s first concussion happened in her grade 10 math class, of all places. A fellow classmate tilted her chair to the side while she was sitting in it, and Colleen took a spin and hit her head.

“I didn’t even know what a concussion was, so I thought I could rest over the weekend and feel better. I never did start to feel better though.”

After four days of suffering, her parents and teachers insisted she seek medical care at the Montreal Children’s Hospital’s (MCH) Emergency Department (ED), where Colleen was diagnosed with a mild Traumatic Brain Injury (mTBI), otherwise known as a concussion.

Just two years later, she found herself in the same position when she went up for a rebound during a high school basketball game. A fellow player accidentally hit her in the temple.

Her most recent experience, she says, involved a six- to seven-month recovery period that often tested her patience, but ultimately

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taught her how to balance the demands of her fast-paced student lifestyle with her new limitations.

“When you’re not concussed, you know how far you can push yourself,” she explains, “but when you have this kind of injury, you have to learn what your new boundaries are, and that can be really difficult to accept.”

Managing concussions through a proactive, comprehensive approach

Thanks to a proactive interprofessional approach developed by MCH Trauma specialists as part of the mTBI Program and Concussion Clinic, patients like Colleen are offered comprehensive assessments, and interventions from a variety of specialists ranging from initial consultation with the Trauma Coordinator, Helen Kocilowicz, who conducts screening and coordination of care, to the physiotherapists, the psychologist, the neuropsychologist, and other consultants as appropriate.

“I was able to get medical help from Dr. Sasha Dubrovsky to manage my headaches, but I also had weekly interventions with Lisa Grilli, my physiotherapist to help me get back on my feet and start working on my balance. Dr. Yves Beaulieu also helped me talk out my frustrations and gave me tricks to help with my concentration and accepting the boundaries of what I was now able to do,” says Colleen, adding that this approach helped make her feel like she was being supported on all fronts.

“Because each child is different, our approach is individualized,” says Debbie Friedman, MCH Trauma Director. “Specific needs must be addressed taking everything into consideration: the patient’s symptoms, previous medical history, academic issues, family reaction, stressors, sports and extracurricular interests and personal goals.”

Looking towards the future

For her part, Colleen is thrilled to have overcome her concussions with help from the entire team. “I honestly wouldn’t have been able to have gotten to this point without them,” she says.

Learn more about Colleen and the MCH’s mTBI Program and Concussion Clinic at www.thechildren.com/ConfrontingConcussions •

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