

Guest Post: The Second Half of Recovery

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Speech Pathology and Brain Injuries

Pictured: Guest writer Julee Harris, a speech and hearing sciences major at Utah State University.

I destroyed my wrist snowboarding a few years ago, and it was the worst recovery ever. I had two surgeries, a couple of casts, and a souvenir of seven screws to prove my story. Besides icing and relaxing the sore bones, the most important part of that recovery was the physical therapy needed to restore its function. Believe it or not, my wrist was stiff and practically useless by the time I was done icing and relaxing. My bones healed but my muscles now needed some work. I quickly discovered that my wrist couldn't rotate. That was horrible.

By the time I graduated physical therapy I could rotate my wrist, bend it, lift objects, and go back to normal. I did all the practice movements and followed the rules, and the results followed.

Like the physical therapist who helped me with my wrist, showing me how to move it and what to practice at home, a speech pathologist will do the same. They will assess, diagnose, and set exercises for the patient. Once I graduate I want to be part of the healing process

for severe brain injuries. These could be concussions, strokes, tumors, or other types of brain damage. These injuries result in a myriad of symptoms. Daily tasks are interrupted by deficiencies in attention, memory, processing speed, and language. Speech therapists help patients regain their sense of self and communication by treating these various symptoms. This can look different for every patient, but common strategies for recovery can be sorted into two categories, memory and speech. Memory strategies can be: increasing attention span, using lists or organizers, increasing memory with memory games, focus techniques, and good cognitive health practices. The speech side of recovery can look like relearning conversation patterns, building vocabulary, reading and writing comprehension, or working on clearer speech. There is a lot involved in the rehabilitation and recovery process for these injuries (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2025).

I'm sure you looked at the recovery lists above and thought, "Those things are pretty easy for me. I can make a to-do list, or I can focus on my current task, or I know how to take turns in conversation. It feels a bit extreme to have an entire career around those *daily tasks*. Won't the brain just heal on its own?"

Similar to my wrist recovery having two parts, this recovery also has two parts. The body will heal on its own, but the brain will need targeted work to get back to regular function. That's why I want to be involved in the speech pathology world. I want to work on that second half of recovery. The fact that not all things heal together isn't new, it's seen in all sorts of places. I saw it firsthand with my wrist. I knew what my wrist should be doing, but it wasn't doing what I wanted it to do. I imagine recovering from severe brain injuries is similar. The patients know what their brain can do, but it's not working as it should. I want to bridge that gap and bring back normalcy and function to others' lives.

I haven't had any patients yet, but I've seen the impact of this career through study and observation hours. Most people who hear that I'm studying speech pathology have a positive story about a speech therapist who's helped them, or has helped someone they love. I had a co-worker who excitedly told me about her son with autism—how he is learning to use a speaking tablet and how much that has impacted her and her family. Hearing positive stories like this encourages me to keep studying and builds excitement for an impactful career helping people to both express themselves and nurture the ability to do daily tasks.

I am planning on graduating with my bachelor's degree in speech and hearing sciences this spring, and will then pursue a master's in speech pathology. I still have a bit of school ahead of me, so I'll be in Logan for a while. With

the time that I'm here I'm looking forward to the future, and being part of a healing community.

For more information, visit the [American Speech-Language-Hearing Association](#).