

Injured surfer transferred to Colorado hospital

December 24, 2020



Zac Abblitt's life changed last month after a day of surfing went wrong.

The Brookings 18-year-old dove head-first into shallow water and didn't come up until he was pulled out by friends nearby. The dive fractured vertebrae and paralyzed Abblitt from the neck down.

Up until about a week ago, Abblitt was slowly regaining muscle function at a hospital in Redding, California. But since then, he's been transferred to a new hospital, where he'll be for several months.

In the meantime, his family in Brookings is going through the highs and lows of his recovery, but is remaining optimistic.

"They're all very strong, I would say," said Kevin Knoll, Abblitt's uncle who's been coordinating community support for his recovery.

Currently, a big reason for their optimism is Abblitt's transfer to Craig Hospital in Englewood, Colorado. There he's seeing experts in spinal cord rehabilitation.

His condition has improved, and he's often seen talking and laughing in videos posted by family members on a Facebook group dedicated to updating friends about his recovery.

"I know that though all of this God's just been such a blessing in everything that he's done," Abblitt said in one of those videos. "I am highly encouraged, just the support that I've had from people, and just what God has been doing, and how I've seen others touched, too."

But, largely paralyzed from the waist down and classified as an incomplete C5-C6 quadriplegic, Abblitt's best hope for a return to more normal body function is intensive rehabilitation.

"They're in therapy right now," Knoll said. "They're doing stuff every day, about eight hours a day."

Even still, it's hard to predict what the outcome of that therapy could be.

But just because only Abblitt and his mother are now in Colorado away from home, that doesn't mean he's alone. Abblitt's family has set up an online community to support his recovery, including a website, donation platform and online shop.

"I've had five donors from Japan give because they saw his story on a Japanese surf website," Knoll said.

The family's developed a slogan, morphing it into a hashtag and a logo for T-shirts and wristbands: "#zacsHope."

"It has kind of this double meaning. Zac's hope is to be whole again," Knoll said. "But the real meaning behind the hashtag is that Zac's hope is Jesus."

Abblitt and the family have seen a lot of support from their church community, and Knoll said they're confident that the injury and road to recovery are all part of God's plan.

"If we just focus on what's happening, it's very discouraging," Knoll said, adding that trusting in their faith keeps them optimistic. "This is Zac's purpose right now."

The family also points to a Bible verse, Hebrews 12:1-3, for inspiration. It's printed on some of the T-shirts they've gotten made to support Abblitt's recovery.

"...Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith..." the verse says in part.

Again, Knoll said there's a double meaning behind the choice. First, that Abblitt is in the "race of his life" to rehabilitate himself and regain his usual function.

"But again, it's not the biological and physical that we're ultimately focused on," Knoll said. Instead, the family is focused on Abblitt as an example of rehabilitation and the power of faith.

That road to recovery will likely be a long, and expensive one. But Knoll said the family is all behind him, rallying around the idea of "zacsHope."

Abblitt's family posts updates on their website, where community members can donate to his family as well: zacshope.com.