

'Compassion doesn't cost a dollar'

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Lying in hospital after a horrific car crash, teenager Chloe Youngson could see nothing but the ceiling tiles. Specialists marvelled that she was even alive after smashing the top two vertebrae in her neck. The formerly active 18-year-old was put in traction - immobilised to let her badly injured neck heal - for three months. Chloe was unable to see who entered her room, to watch television or even read a book.

Her dad, Auckland anaesthetist Robin Youngson, was working at the hospital when she was admitted after the accident four years ago. And although he was part of the management team, he and his wife, Meredith, became increasingly concerned about some staff's lack of interest in their daughter's psychological well-being.

"In our opinion, if we didn't do something urgently, she was going to become severely clinically depressed. I was a powerful person in the system; I had been a senior specialist in the hospital and I worked in management and I was on a national committee. It doesn't

matter which hospital it was because I think these things can happen in any hospital. I thought I could get this system to recognise how to meet her needs, and I completely failed."

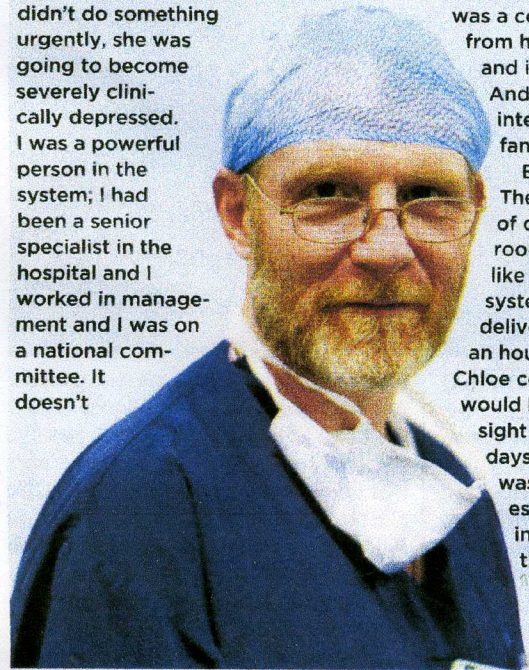
In the end, Robin and Meredith - and a wide circle of family and friends - helped restore a semblance of life for Chloe. Youngson resigned his anaesthetist's position and set to work building disability aids for his daughter. He bought an expensive laptop computer and a mobile phone and suspended them above Chloe's bed so she had access to the outside world. Yet even then, things didn't run smoothly, he says.

"When we asked the hospital for an internet connection, they said you can't have that and listed all the reasons why it couldn't happen, even though there was a computer dataport a metre away from her bed. Eventually, I pulled rank and insisted that it had to be done.

And just connecting her to the internet, the email and movies was fantastic."

But more shocks were in store. The family discovered the system of delivering food to patients' rooms was unsuitable for a patient like Chloe. "There's a really good system to ensure a meal-tray is delivered to a room and taken away an hour later," says Youngson, "but Chloe could not feed herself and a tray would be left out of reach and out of sight and taken away again. Many days she'd go hungry and the food was such poor quality - it was essential for her healing, for her injuries and her fractures to get the best quality nutrition."

The Youngsons drew up a roster of family and friends



Robin Youngson: shocked.

