# Scuba exercises help stroke survivor recover

A man from Clinton, Utah (USA) is going beneath the surface of the water in hopes of someday becoming physically whole again. "*I see me being a whole person (in a couple of years)*", said 48-year-old Mark Wager, who is using scuba diving as a form of physical therapy after having a stroke on Feb. 6, 2009. During that incident, which occurred in Clearfield, he was arrested by Davis County sheriff's deputies on suspicion of driving while intoxicated. He was handcuffed and put into the back of a patrol car. It was not until police took Wager to Davis Hospital and Medical Center in Layton for a blood draw that they discovered he had suffered a stroke. From there, Wager was flown by helicopter to University of Utah Medical Center, where he remained in recovery for weeks. Wager's rehabilitation from his stroke continues, as twice weekly he attends two-hour scuba sessions in the pool of the George E. Wahlen Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Salt Lake City. Wager said the sessions are beginning to strengthen the muscles in his left arm, left leg and left side of his body, which he described as being "useless" at one time after the stroke.  But not anymore.  Wager, a former Hill Air Force Base aircraft mechanic who took medical leave from his job in May 2011, said his therapy regimen will, over time, allow him to regain full use of his left arm and leg.

"**I'm using muscle I haven't used before**," said Wager, who since September has regularly participated in the therapy sessions with veterans who are amputees as a result of war. Wager said the therapy was recommended to him by a hospital doctor. The physical therapy he was doing before taking to the water, Wager said, got him back on his feet, but did not give him the muscle improvement he was looking for. "Even after two years, I had a lot of problems with my walking. Before I did the scuba diving, I used to have to wear a brace on my foot to support it. I don't have to wear a brace anymore, because I can use my ankle," he said. Tonua Hamilton, a physical therapist at the VA hospital, said she recommended Wager enroll in the scuba program offered at the pool on the hospital campus after running into him in the hall of the hospital.

Hamilton said Wager was the first veteran in the rehabilitation program that began in May. Wager's scuba therapy has given him more freedom of movement by "not having gravity as an enemy anymore," Hamilton said. Wager also is receiving occupational therapy at the hospital, Hamilton said, resulting in his experiencing "some upper body strength and improved function in his (left) arm". But the unique therapy Wager is using in his rehabilitation isn't any more unique than the details and events surrounding his stroke experience. While suffering his stroke, which Wager suspects was brought on by a Gulf War illness, he was suspected by Davis sheriff's officials of driving while intoxicated.

Had it not been for the deputy who arrested him stopping at the Layton hospital for a blood draw instead of taking him directly to jail, Wager is uncertain what his fate may have been. "They never apologized," he said of the sheriff's office.

As a result, Wager said, he has yet to forgive the five officers who responded to the scene that night. Deputies asked him to step out of his vehicle so he could undergo a sobriety test, Wager said, but he collapsed while getting out of his vehicle and was unable to walk. However, officials at the scene report a different version of what occurred. When asked whether he had any medical problems, Wager told deputies he had fibromyalgia, according to reports. Officials also asked Wager if he wanted to be transported to the hospital for further assessment, to which Wager replied he did not and signed the refusal form for transport in the ambulance that had arrived on scene, the report states. Wager did not file any civil complaint against the deputies, but did make a formal request to the state Emergency Medical

Services Board to require deputy paramedics be better trained in recognizing the difference between someone who is intoxicated and someone who is experiencing a stroke.

**Link**

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