

# MARCH ON for Brain Injury

BRAIN INJURY ASSOCIATION  
OF NEW YORK STATE September 14, 2024 10 am



University of Rochester Medical Center  
Statewide Program Honoree

**University of Rochester Medical Center (URMC)** is the 2024 March On for Brain Injury Statewide Program Honoree. The Acute Inpatient Rehabilitation unit at Strong Memorial Hospital meets the complex needs of adult and pediatric patients recovering from traumatic brain injury. Led by board-certified and fellowship-trained physician with expertise in brain injury rehabilitation medicine, the multidisciplinary care team is comprised of rehabilitation nurses, physical and occupational therapists, speech and language pathologists, recreational therapists, care managers, dietitians, and psychologists. The focus is restoring independence by improving problems with

cognition, balance, strength, motor control, vision, swallowing, and other deficits that adversely affect patients' daily lives.

As western New York's largest and the Rochester region's only Level 1 trauma facility, Strong Memorial Hospital is a destination for patients from across upstate NY who require advanced levels of trauma care. The new 11 bed Acute Brain Injury Neuro-Rehabilitation Unit further strengthens UR Medicine's comprehensive system of acute care and recovery for moderate to severe brain injury, which also includes the UR Medicine Comprehensive Stroke Center, the Mobile Stroke Unit, Neuromedicine ICU, and the Kessler Burn and Trauma Center. The new unit supplements the existing 20-bed Acute Inpatient Rehabilitation Unit at Strong Memorial Hospital, increasing total acute inpatient rehabilitation beds at the hospital to 31.

"The unit is physically designed to appropriately manage patients with cognitive and behavioral deficits and accounts for the clinical, physical, cognitive, communication, and nutritional conditions necessary to create an optimal environment for the brain to heal," said Heather Ma, MD, a brain injury rehabilitation medicine specialist and assistant professor of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation. Ma is division chief of UR Medicine's Brain Injury Rehabilitation Medicine service line and is medical director and division chief of Acute Inpatient Rehabilitation Medicine. "The staff are uniquely qualified to guide recovery, help patients improve or maintain function, and improve overall health and quality of life after an acute brain injury."

URMC is a longtime resource and supporter of the Brain Injury Association of New York State, URMC continues to push forward to support and help heal brain injury survivors. Their programs and services are making a tremendous impact.



Dr. Brian Im  
Statewide Medical Honoree

The 2024 March On for Brain Injury Medical Honoree, **Dr. Brian Im** completed his physical medicine and rehabilitation residency at NYU School of Medicine/Rusk Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine and subsequently did a fellowship in brain injury rehabilitation medicine at UMDNJ/Johnson Rehabilitation Institute. Upon finishing his fellowship, Dr. Im returned to Bellevue Hospital specifically with an interest to improve the brain injury rehabilitation program for the underserved public city hospital population. During his five years at Bellevue, Dr. Im became the director of the brain injury rehabilitation program.

Currently, Dr. Im is director of brain injury rehabilitation at Rusk Rehabilitation where he continues to treat inpatients. He is also co-director of the TBI model systems project at Rusk Rehabilitation and Bellevue Hospital, co-director of the NYU Concussion Center, and the fellowship director for the NYU Rusk Rehabilitation brain injury medicine fellowship.

Incredibly supportive of the work of the Brain Injury Association of New York State and a member of the association's board, Dr. Im works to help spread awareness and raise valuable funds to support the programs and services that BIANYS provides to the brain injury community, a community that he proudly supports.

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Caleb Brunick  
Hudson Valley Honoree

A New Yorker, who has lived on four continents, in six countries, and in three different states, **Caleb Michael-Camprone Brunick**, a military and diplomatic child, grew up immersed in different cultures and languages. Learning from an early age that you must work hard to achieve what you want and to never give up, Caleb always chooses to push past his limit.

While in university, Caleb discovered his love for standup comedy. Through school and after graduation to his first job, Caleb performed standup any chance he got. In December 2021, Caleb was leaving a show when the vehicle he was traveling in was in an accident on an icy road. Caleb's friend sadly succumbed to his injuries, and Caleb sustained multiple breaks and fractures, as well as a traumatic brain injury with full diagnosis of diffuse axonal injury grade 3. With physicians giving little hope given for survival, Caleb's parents and sister knew they could not leave his side. For two months, they learned everything they could about traumatic brain injury, listened to music, read Caleb his favorite books, and performed range of motion on him all day, every day, with the goal to get him back to the United States.

In February 2022, Caleb was internationally transported back to the US from Tartu, Estonia to Sunnyview Rehabilitation Hospital in Schenectady, where he stayed for the next two months. Day by day with the help of therapists, doctors and nurses' things that were once said to be impossible became a living reality which Caleb's surpassed. After being discharged from Sunny View Hospital, Caleb continued outpatient Physical and Occupational therapy for months. To this day still, he is continuing Speech Therapy.

Onto the next chapter of his life, Caleb deals with the lingering effects of his TBI and copes with the loss of everything he knew, friends, employment, education, comedy and the love of his life gone, but that did not stop him. With his mother, grandmother and his grandfather Pop, Caleb moves forward, refusing to let the TBI be his defining factor and instead will define his TBI and continue to be the voice for those who were unable to regain their own voice.

As the 2024 March On for Brain Injury Hudson Valley Honoree, Caleb is excited to share his story, while he raises funds for programs like the support groups that brought him to the Brain Injury Association of New York State and continues to advocate for those who can't advocate for themselves while living the best life that he can.

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Emily Sciascia  
Long Island Honoree

In December of 2022, Emily was the backseat passenger of a car accident that temporarily took her life. She sustained a severe TBI, facial fractures, fractures to the arm and the foot, and multiple locations of bruising and bleeding. It was believed that she wouldn't make it through the night and then she did. It was then believed she wouldn't walk or talk again, but then she did. Her recovery was sudden and, in some ways, unbelievable, but not to her family who have known her to be incredibly stubborn, tenacious, and ultimately unshakable since childhood.

Emily gives much credit to the friends and family that brushed her half of a head of hair, read to her while she slept, listened to her tell the same stories repeatedly, and always met her wherever she could make it in the times she needed to be reminded that she is still strong, brave, and beautiful. She gives special credit to her eleven-year-old nephew Jack who is a constant reminder to always show up for herself and others.

During this past year following her accident, she has relearned how to walk and how to speak, she has fallen back in love with writing, reading, and making art, she has started enjoying the mornings more than she ever had before, she has gotten accepted into neuroscience programs, and she has learned not to resent the wounded self but instead, to hold her. She is equal parts poet and wit, which people close to her find all the more remarkable after having undergone brain surgery. When she asked her dear friend what he would say about her, he described Emily as “a distillation of wonder - a sound intellect, good-humored, a survivor, and above all, a graceful companion.”



Mo and Eric O'Brien  
Rochester Honorees

For anyone that meets **Maureen (Mo) and Eric O'Brien**, you immediately see the love, care, and respect that they have for each other, and you soon learn that they are survivors. Mo and Eric met in high school, though it wasn't until their later years that they would be united. Early in their relationship, they faced the toughest challenges with their lives.

Eric sustained multiple concussions that went untreated throughout his youth and young adulthood. In June 2021, Eric was recovering from a brain surgery that removed a colloid cyst. One month later Mo found him unresponsive and seizing. For the next 18 days, Eric was in a coma, where he was not expected to recover or come home, yet he survived.

Three years later, Mo and Eric continue on their journey of patience, perseverance, learning and relearning as their “new selves” (brain injury does not just affect the patient, but also the spouse, family, and entire support system). Mo and Eric credit their faith in Jesus Christ, the medical professionals and staff at UPMC, friends, and family for the amazing progress Eric has, *and continues to make*, in his ongoing recovery.

They may not have chosen brain injury but it has certainly challenged and developed them both in surprising ways! Mo and Eric are extremely grateful to have found the Brain Injury Association of New York State, whom they refer to as “our people”.

Committed partners in everything, including advocacy, Mo and Eric enjoy supporting, educating, and advocating for themselves and others. They participate in BIANYS activities, always lending a voice. Beyond thrilled to be serving as the 2024 March On for Brain Injury Rochester Honorees, they will continue to shine a light on and support the brain injury community.

To learn more about March On for Brain Injury and the programs and services of the Brain Injury Association of New York State, please visit [www.bianys.org](http://www.bianys.org)

March On for Brain Injury is Presented by:

