For Corey Davis, there’s no such thing as ‘plateau’

The evidence of Corey Davis’ remarkable commitment to recovery is neatly spread around his cozy Eastern Shore cottage. In the closet is a pair of Yellow Zoots that powered him through a half-marathon. In the computer room resides the cherry-red road bike that Davis navigated through a recent 100-mile one-day Brain Injury Foundation fundraiser. And in his dresser sits the spandex body suit that propelled him through a three-mile ocean swim, a prep for this June’s 4.4 mile Great Chesapeake Bay Swim.

That’s quite an athletic resume for a guy who, not very long ago, couldn’t make it from one end of the pool to the other. “I was [swimming] like hell, but I sank,” says Davis, 43, sporting an orange T-shirt that says “You Only Have One. Take Care of It.”

That’s “one” as in “one brain.” And in Davis’ case, it’s a brain that’s been to Hades and back. In 2006, he and his motorcycle were forced off the road at 50 mph and he careened into a ditch. Fortunately, he was wearing a helmet. The self-described former “hellion” spent seven weeks in a coma, then shuttled through several hospitals, Shock Trauma, and a rehab center. And though all the care he received was strong, Davis says he never got the sense that the numerous therapists and physicians who treated him were coordinating their efforts to address his shattered mind.

Enter Hopkins’ Kate Kortte. By title, she’s a neuropsychologist in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation’s Outpatient NeuroRehabilitation program. The program specializes in treating people with traumatic brain injuries (TBI) and others with brain damage as a result of stroke, tumor, or infection—long after other institutions have insisted such patients have “plateaued” and can no longer expect further improvement. As important, Kortte’s the ear that so many patients so fervently desire, the uber case manager who asks that simplest yet most important of questions:

“So…what do you want out of rehab?”

For Davis, this was phenomenal news. An all-around athlete before his injuries, the first-year, post-crash, “I didn’t even scratch the surface. I wasn’t running, swimming, or biking yet.”

Kortte’s work, coordinating Davis’ care among five of the unit’s 12-member team of occupational and physical therapists, speech language pathologists, and rehab physicians, was equaled by Davis’ drive. Like most recoveries, it wasn’t a straight line of progress; Davis’ marriage ended in the wake of the crash, and the inevitable changes—being unable to work his old construction job, the relative slowness of recovery, the slight difficulty talking that leaves his brain thinking faster than his ability to process speech—all left him at times fighting an understandable depression.

Yet he’s not battling that alone. Kortte’s there—“She’s really a life coach,” says Davis. “I’m in contact via e-mail a lot. She’s encouraged me, and it’s really nice to have her.”

Today, six years removed from the accident, Davis says he’s very content with the new man he’s become. Thanks to Kortte’s team, he’s learned to navigate his TBI; his focus and memory have improved to the point that he re-qualified for both his driver’s license and certification as a boat captain. Triathalons are once again part of his routine, and both Kortte and Davis are convinced that his diligent efforts in biking, swimming, and running are greatly benefiting his cognitive abilities. His speech processing is worlds better than the nearly unintelligible utterances that marked his emergence from the coma; now all that remains is a slight slurring. He’s also working again—as a mentor to an autistic young adult seeking to live independently.

It’s a job he couldn’t have imagined doing before his accident. “I wouldn’t have had the patience. In my mind, the old [Corey] wasn’t as good. I took too many things for granted, things came too easy,” he says. “Now, I’m ecstatic where I am.”

Mat Edelson