



PHYSIOTHERAPY NEW ZEALAND | MOVEMENT FOR LIFE
Kōmiri Aotearoa

THE LATEST NEWS
& VIEWS FROM
PHYSIOTHERAPY
NEW ZEALAND
DECEMBER 2016



PHYSIO MATTERS

**Tis the season for giving -
volunteering overseas is the
perfect gift**

Reinventing Emma

As an occupational therapist and avid long-distance runner, Emma Gee's life was turned upside down when she survived a stroke at the young age of 24 during an operation to remove an Arteriovenous Malformation (AVM), a tangle of blood vessels in the brain.



Emma Gee

Upon waking from a nine-day coma, Emma spent the subsequent years re-learning how to do everything again – walk, talk, swallow and blink.

“I was diagnosed with dysphagia, dysarthria, nystagmus, diplopia, sensory, balance and mobility deficits.”

Emma was now a patient reliant on the medical and rehabilitation system she had worked within.

Emma set about a stringent routine of therapy with the hope of allowing her to live normally again. However after years of trying to return to her existing life as the ‘old Em’, through adapting to her new realm overtime, she learnt the importance of person-centred care. She also learned the significance of empowering people with disabilities by emphasising their abilities – not their disabilities. Emma learnt the huge role of one’s resilience in navigating through life’s daily obstacles with a chronic condition.

“I become determined to reinvent myself as the ‘new Em’.”

Frustrated and bored but unable to physically return to her old job working with Neurorehabilitation outpatients, she spent her energy on relearning how to communicate better, hoping that one day she could communicate with others what lay dormant in her disabled body. She volunteered in universities, did public speaking course and began working on her endurance and articulation. Years of both daily rehabilitation and figuring out how best to self-manage her chronic symptoms, Emma began her own inspirational speaking business, attempting to empower others who receive and provide care.

Juggling her own rehabilitation is difficult, but she has learnt how she can manage her chronic nerve pain

with yoga, swimming and meditation, ensuring she always has a good balance in life. Through her daily battles of living with the many obstacles in her path, Emma is adamant to prove that she is “still a person, just a person with a disability” in all that she does.

Today, Emma lives in Melbourne with her six-year-old cavoodle, Gilbert. She has since launched her own inspirational speaking business, regularly offering her thoughts and solutions on resilience and person-centred care through her keynotes and workshops. She will be touring New Zealand in March 2017.

Reinventing Emma by Emma Gee, \$30, available in bookstores and at emma-gee.com.



Emma Gee in a coma