



Craig's story – wood machinist whose arm was amputated

One day at work in July 2001, everything changed for wood machinist, Craig Dunn. He was cutting board with a beam saw at a Wingfield-based furniture manufacturer, when he amputated his arm just above the wrist.

"I can remember seeing my jumper full of blood and walking about two steps and screaming," said Craig, recalling the horrific incident.

Colleagues rushed to Craig's aid and their quick action saved his hand. Workmate Jason Szabadics comforted Craig to ease the shock while helping stem the flow of blood from his injured arm. Other workmates called an ambulance and placed the severed hand on ice.

Throughout it all Craig remained awake and aware. "He didn't faint, he's the toughest guy I know," said Jason.

During ten hours of emergency microsurgery at the Royal Adelaide Hospital, Craig's hand was reattached.

"Complex surgery like this is not guaranteed but it went smoothly. In one sense he was lucky – there was bone either side to plate together," said orthopedic surgeon, Dr Michael Sandow, who operated on Craig's hand. The specialist surgery involved the replantation of 37 structures – tendons and nerves – in the hand and wrist.

"It was pleasing that the technical aspects of the surgery were so successful. There was always the risk of the macro implant not working," said Dr Sandow.

Imagine Craig's surprise and joy when he awoke after surgery to find he had some movement in his re-attached hand. "If I could, I'd have jumped out of bed and danced around the place," Craig said.

Over the coming months, Craig's determination and positive view of life were tested. In the weeks after leaving hospital, he underwent intensive physical therapy as his hand healed and he regained strength and re-learned how to use it. "It didn't really feel like my hand straight away, I had some tingling but mostly numbness and I didn't get any sensation for six months," said Craig.

Occupational and certified hand therapist, Suzanne Caragianis, worked intensively with Craig to help him regain strength and movement in his hand.

"We mainly worked with splints, strengthening and sensory re-education – because after such a complex procedure the brain has to learn to use the hand again. Craig was remarkable in his recovery," she said.

Craig's rehabilitation program also involved a home exercise program, where every two hours he did a range of exercises; he also used splints to increase functions and movement.

While Craig's hand will never be the same again, it is expected that over time he will regain significant use.

"The latest scientific studies show that there can be improvement in nerves and hand function for up to two years, so there is still potential for Craig to recover further, but slowly," said Ms Caragianis. "And Craig has remarkable motivation to improve."

With an inspiring humility and fighting spirit, Craig focused on getting back to work as quickly as possible. "I couldn't sit at home. I'm not that sort of person," he said. "The company encouraged me to come back and kept me involved and included. I always felt as if there was a place there for me."

Surprising his workmates, medical professionals and the Claims Agent, Craig returned to his employer, just 12 weeks after suffering his work injury.

"We were very concerned about the impact on Craig personally and on his family, and were very keen to assist in whatever way possible," said Peter Schulze, General Manager. "We identified an appropriate role for Craig that has developed over time. His career has changed direction but uses as a base his many years of experience – his career opportunities have opened up."

Craig is now involved in project management, administration and, most importantly, still using his years of expertise on the factory floor.

Peter Schulze describes Craig's attitude as amazing, saying, "there are no barriers for Craig."

In December 2002, he organised a meeting with Craig's sporting hero, champion racing driver the late Peter Brock, "because they both are inspirational people". Peter Brock praised Craig's positive mental attitude and said, "it shows the tremendous capacity of the human body to recover from injuries, but it's the individual's own determination and desire that is a major factor in deciding how quickly and how well they recover."

"Craig's injury further heightened our awareness of occupational health and safety issues and employer responsibilities," said Peter Schulze.

The company responded immediately to the crisis. Counselling was provided to distressed staff and changes were made to the beam saw to prevent a similar accident happening again. Plans are underway to replace such equipment with highly automated machinery incorporating pressure-sensitive safety features. And they've also looked at other workplace hazards such as lifting heavy loads.

"OH&S receives the highest priority in the organisation," Peter said.

The company has paid a hefty price for Craig's workplace injury, despite being a quality assured organisation with well-managed systems in place.

Apart from loss of productivity during and after the incident, the company invested in auditing its approach to safety, also spending time responding to the investigation by the Department of Administrative and Information Services (Workplace Services).

As a result of prosecution, the company faced legal fees and a fine of \$22,500 (not including costs) imposed by the SA Industrial Relations Court.

"And it will have a significant impact on our WorkCover levy," said Peter. "Over recent years we've enjoyed the benefit of a bonus rate. Not only is that eliminated, there will be a penalty imposed."