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National Paralysis Awareness Week, 1988

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

We should all be aware that spinal cord injuries paralyze some 12,000 Americans each year, adding to the total of nearly half a million citizens whose lives have undergone this sudden and tragic change. Motor vehicle accidents are the chief cause of these injuries, and young men are the most at risk; but spinal cord injuries happen in many ways, and to anyone at any age. War wounds have taken a large toll. Recreational and sports accidents injure many, and so do mishaps in the home. Paralyzed people meet challenges such as physical limitations, rehabilitation, and drains on financial resources with determination, ingenuity, and a positive outlook. We do well to hold a week in recognition of the needs, capabilities, accomplishments, and courage of paralyzed Americans and of efforts in their behalf.

Understanding of paralysis continues to grow, thanks to biomedical research led by scientists supported by the National Institute of Neurological and Communicative Disorders and Stroke. One major advance, with promising applicability to humans, is the realization that injured nerve cells in animals' spinal cords can regrow and may reassume function. Other developments are continuing.

Regeneration of nerve cells appears to hold the best biological hope for paralyzed limbs. Scientifically developed neural prostheses that use electrodes to connect nerve cells to muscle fibers are permitting some restoration of function. Investigators are seeking ways to limit post-injury tissue destruction by controlling substances within the body that ironically damage spinal cord tissue as they relieve trauma-induced pain and swelling. Such work has provided new research leads that may one day enable people with injured spinal cords to walk again.

The Veterans' Administration has also long been a leader in spinal cord injury clinical and research efforts. The VA operates the largest system of spinal cord injury facilities in the world, serving approximately 20,000 patients each year in 20 centers around our country. The VA also supports some 175 such research projects.

As we continue our national program of basic and clinical research on nervous system trauma, let us take the occasion of National Paralysis Awareness Week, 1988, to resolve to do our share, personally and as communities, to assist, befriend, and learn from paralyzed Americans.

The Congress, by Senate Joint Resolution 364, has designated the week of October 2 through October 8, 1988, as "National Paralysis Awareness Week" and authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation in observance of this week.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim the week of October 2 through October 8, 1988, as National Paralysis Awareness Week, and I call upon the people of the United States to observe this week with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this seventh day of October, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirteenth.

Ronald Reagan