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NH man medically dead during Mexico vacation beats all odds, twice

By: [Laura Montenegro\(/pages/reporters/?id=16\)](#)

NH1.com

WINDHAM — A man dead for 24 minutes after drowning in Atlantic Ocean while in Mexico on vacation with his wife remains optimistic despite a seemingly long road to recovery.

"Having a positive attitude really gets you through and makes you stronger," 47-year-old Joe Sharron said. "I'm a firm believer in that."

Sharron was an avid outdoorsman. From kitesurfing to snowboarding, he always kept up an active lifestyle. In his professional life, Sharron worked with startup companies in the Boston area helping with recruiting and what he calls, "building a world class culture."



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But everything changed Dec. 13.

Sharron and his wife, Michelle, escaping the New Hampshire cold, were enjoying a vacation to Cancun, Mexico. The couple was staying at the J.W. Marriott as they had done several times before.

Sharron recalls the couple had lunch that day, then went down to the pool. Around 3 p.m., Michelle left for the spa to get a massage.

"A couple hours later, she was in the emergency room, and they were ready to do spinal surgery on me," Joe Sharron said. "The rest really is speculation as to what happened. Because so far no one has come forward with any version of a story. And I don't remember anything that happened at all. I don't remember making my way to the ocean. I don't remember breaking my neck or drowning."

According to a Colombian tourist who spotted and pulled Sharron's body from the water in front of the resort next door, two different lifeguards administered CPR, but both stopped because he was purple and blue and they believed he was dead. The Colombian then ran and got a third lifeguard who was able to bring Sharron back to life after 24 minutes without a pulse.

"There is a surveillance video that the hotel has but they haven't released it," Sharron said. "So until I get that, I really don't know and don't want to speculate what happened."

After spinal surgery at a private Mexican hospital, Sharron was airlifted to Boston's Mass General where he spent several days in the ICU in an induced coma fighting for his life.

Sharron spinal cord injury was classified as an ASIA-A Complete, the most severe diagnosis, meaning there is little chance Sharron would regain feeling, sensation or movement below the neck. Despite being dead for 24 minutes, Sharron didn't suffer from Traumatic Brain Injury. He has a clear memory of his life before the accident and since then.

Sharron, however, decided he wasn't going to settle as a paraplegic. After he was stabilized at Mass General, he was transferred to a rehab hospital.

"I went to Spaulding Rehabilitation. I worked with some of the best spinal cord doctors, best physical therapists, and we started to get movement in my arms," Sharron said. "And after about six weeks we started to get movement in my legs."

Sharron said much of the focus on therapy at Spaulding was regaining strength since he lost about 25 pounds of muscle because of atrophy.

After Spaulding, Sharron spent some time at Crotched Mountain Rehabilitation Facility in New Hampshire before he was transferred to Gaylord Specialty Healthcare in Connecticut, where he remains currently.

Sharron said like most people suffering a spinal cord injury, he's in excruciating pain daily, but that doesn't prevent him from trying to move forward.

"It took me six months to be able to lift my hand up to my face so I could feed myself with a spoon," he said.

Sharron said he was hoping to be walking by now but has to accept the recovery process is slow. Ultimately, he wants to kitesurf again someday.

The financial burden of spinal cord injuries like Sharron's are astronomical. Insurance will absorb some of the costs, but there are still day-to-day expenses that aren't covered, as well as adaptive living conditions, from ramps to a handicap van. Sharron's friend, Christophe Lemaire, set up a [GoFundMe page](https://www.gofundme.com/jumping-for-joe) (<https://www.gofundme.com/jumping-for-joe>) to help offset some of the burden.

"He is incredibly positive and driven," Lemaire said of his friend. "I can't imagine being in the situation he was in and having the type of enthusiasm, spirit and positivity that he exudes. He's an incredible human being."

Lemaire believes his friend can make a full recovery.

"If anyone can do well it's him," Lemaire said. "Simply because his amazing drive and dedication to getting better."

Sharron's family has set up a challenge for family and friends as Sharron faces the biggest challenge of his life. You can read more at www.joesharronchallenge.com (<http://www.joesharronchallenge.com/>).

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