



A Stroke Survivor's Story: Occurrence Through Recovery

July 24, 2014, started out as just another day for RN Carol Spietz. By the next day, she had a stroke while inpatient for other symptoms. Thankfully, being inpatient during her stroke allowed Carol to receive incredibly quick care.

That July day, Carol walked from her office to the Emergency Room downstairs at Ascension NE St. Elizabeth Hospital. She was experiencing troubling symptoms including weakness, shortness of breath, and blood in her urine. Upon testing, it was found that she had Evans Syndrome, a rare autoimmune disorder wherein the body mistakenly destroys a variety of cells including white blood cells, red blood cells, and platelets. Less than one percent of the population has this condition, but thankfully St. Elizabeth quickly came to the correct diagnosis.

With a low hemoglobin, it became clear that Carol's body was attacking cells. What her providers didn't know was how these dead cells were acting. The next morning, while receiving treatment, Carol had a stroke. Being an RN, Carol was familiar enough with her symptoms and alert enough to recognize what was happening after her arm began to dangle and refuse to move. "I knew it wasn't good," she said, "but also knew that [staff] calling the Code Stroke meant that more help was on its way."

Carol's colleagues rushed her to have a CT scan which showed multiple areas of concern in her brain. After a CT angiogram, providers were able to spot the areas most affected. While her right lobe, particularly the frontoparietal region, was hit hardest, scans also showed impact in the left lobe.

Due to the diagnosis Carol had received just hours earlier, she was not a candidate to receive IV thrombolytics (tPA) to dissolve the clot present. As a nurse, Carol was concerned about what that meant for her outcomes. Thankfully, she was still able to receive IV heparin.

Carol describes this time as one of trust. She was not too concerned by the rare diagnosis she had just received, but was worried about coming back from the stroke. Before heading to the ER, Carol was an incredibly multifaceted person. A mother to three kids, she was also going to school to get her BSN in addition to her work. To go from being so active to needing help with basic activities like telling time, math, and moving her arm was a very difficult situation to manage. The left-sided hemi-neglect syndrome was a challenge to deal with as well.

Once the Evans Syndrome diagnosis was under control, Carol was able to transfer to the ThedaCare Regional Medical Center in Neenah for rehabilitation. Soon she was able to transition to outpatient status with Ascension Rehabilitation Appleton. Carol had a wide support network come through to help her continue the hard work started – and to stay with her when she was physically unable to be alone. She says, "My family really was there for me with their love and support." In addition to getting her access to items she needed, like an ergonomic keyboard to work on typing, her support system took other steps like helping with math and even getting Carol to play video games! "They set me up to play tennis on the Wii so I could work on my eyesight keeping my eye on the ball," she shared.

The Players

Carol Spietz, RN – Quality Management Nurse

The Providers at Ascension NE St.

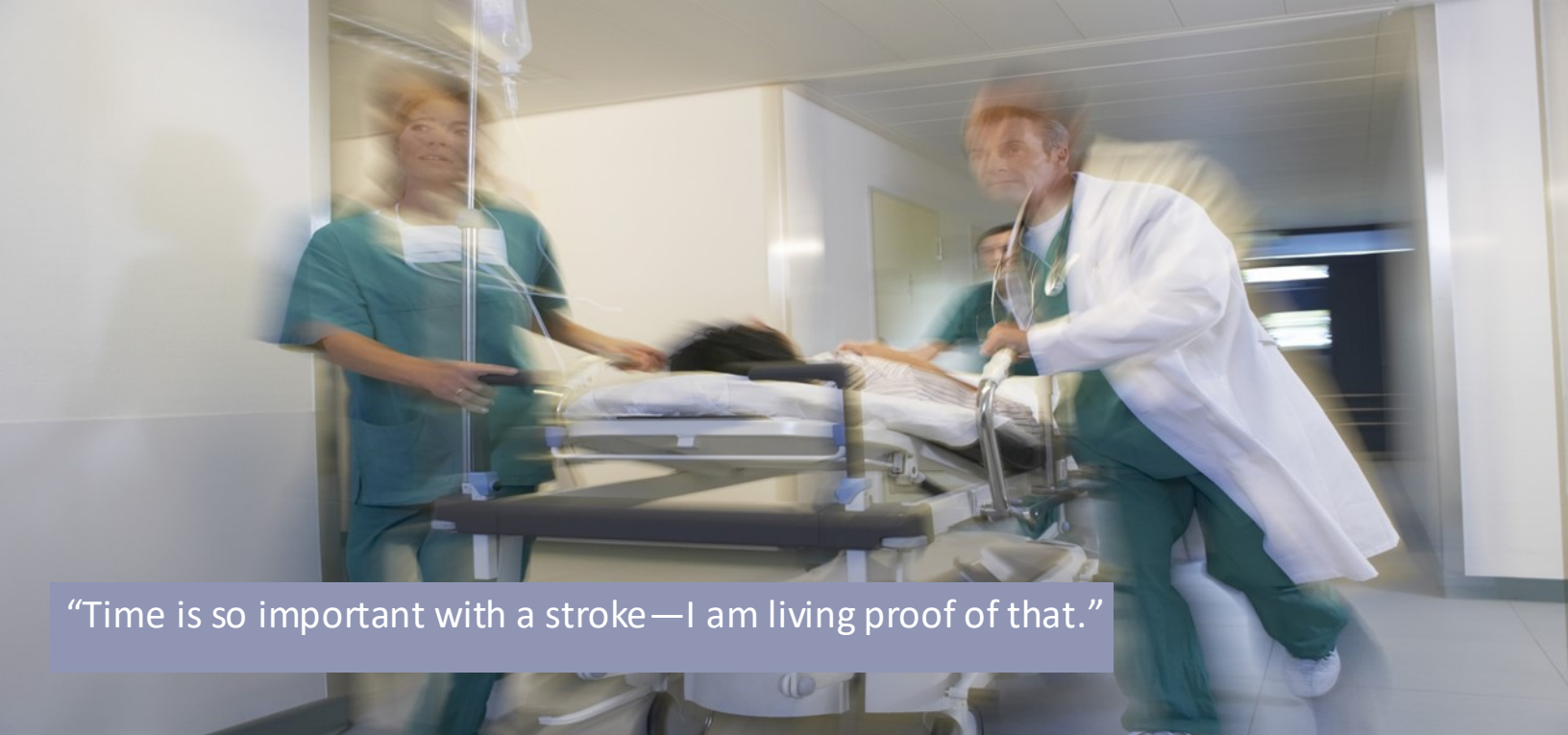
Carol's support system

What They Did

Quick response time. Once it was evident that Carol was having a stroke, the team at Ascension NE St. responded quickly to evaluate her symptoms and set her up for the best possible recovery.

Hard work. Carol put in an incredible amount of hard work throughout her recovery to get as close to her previous abilities as possible.

Support. Carol would not have been able to recover as well as she has without the tenacious efforts and help from her support system.



“Time is so important with a stroke—I am living proof of that.”

Success Factors

Carol counts her age as a large part of her success: “I was 50 years old when I had my stroke, so age was on my side.” She also knows how incredibly lucky she was to have a stroke while in the hospital. “A stroke can happen to anyone,” she says. “You should know your risk factors. Some factors you can’t help like age, gender, race, family history, prior stroke or heart attack. There are other risk factors you can try and control like smoking, high blood pressure, diabetes, and more.”

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What Carol Has Learned

“During my initial part of my hospitalization, all I wanted was to wake up and be back to how I was before the stroke. Now, I just don’t ever want to forget how thankful I am to have to have such an amazing family and group of friends and how much it meant to me that they were there when I needed them most. Before the stroke, I think I was somewhat sensitive to the needs of others, but it really hit me how important it is when I was on the receiving end and needed that support. I hope, going forward, I am as good and caring to others as they were to me. I also don’t think I take life for granted anymore. During my recovery, I had to have chemotherapy treatment for my Evans Syndrome. Between sitting in the chemotherapy room and being a health care worker, I know that there are a lot of people struggling out there. We all get our strength from within ourselves or the support of others, and sometimes it takes an event like I had to realize how blessed and strong we are. I just hope I don’t ever forget it.”

What Carol is Doing Now

Carol is doing well! “I still have some deficits which are small and frustrating at times but I am hopeful that they are still getting better,” she says, while noting it’s been six years since her stroke. “My vision has improved and I can drive and am so thankful to have gotten my independence back. This is something you really don’t think about until it is gone.”

She’s back at work as a Quality Management RN at St. Elizabeth.

Wisconsin Coverdell Stroke Program

The Wisconsin Coverdell Stroke Program works with hospitals, emergency medical services, and professional organizations across the state to support a healthier Wisconsin by improving community awareness and the quality of stroke care. Wisconsin hospitals of all types and sizes are invited to be part of the Wisconsin Coverdell Stroke Program. For more information, please visit the [Wisconsin Coverdell Stroke Program's website](http://www.wisconsincoverdellstrokeprogram.org).

