



Creating a Community: Ascension All Saints Stroke Support Group

Social engagement and connectedness are essential to health, especially after a stroke, because individuals may experience functional and emotional changes. One-third of stroke survivors are affected by post-stroke depression, which is associated with poorer functional outcomes and high mortality rates.¹ Functional outcomes focus on a person's ability to perform activities of daily life such as eating, bathing, dressing, using the restroom, and moving around. Support groups have been shown to increase social connectedness which is linked with better functional outcomes, higher self-efficacy, and improved self-esteem. Stroke support groups benefit the individual recovering from a stroke and can also be helpful for their family members and caregivers. These groups provide opportunities for interpersonal connection, tools for managing functional changes, and help with coping mechanisms.

Prompted by the needs of patients and their families, in 2019 Stroke Coordinator Hollie Landreman worked with acute and subacute care colleagues to form an interdisciplinary team to create a plan for Ascension All Saints' stroke support group. Landreman consulted leaders of other stroke support groups in Wisconsin to create a well-informed proposal that was taken to leadership and approved in January 2020. The first meeting was set to take place in June 2020 but was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When researching options, Landreman discovered there was a support group at All Saints Hospital that ran from 2006 until it dissolved due to low attendance in 2013. This finding resulted in a focus on strategic recruitment and engagement. A flyer was created and is promoted on Ascension social media, at the public library, and in the Racine Journal. It is also placed in patients' stroke education folders given at discharge. Recognizing that not all patients are ready, willing, or able to participate in the support group immediately after discharge, Ascension also mails monthly reminders about the group to patients up to two years after they have been discharged from the hospital.

Ascension All Saints held their first stroke support group meeting, led by Landreman and Recreational Therapist Laura Madison, in August 2021. Since then, a community has been created within Ascension All Saints' stroke support group where stroke survivors and caregivers can access resources, education, and share their experiences in a safe environment. This space reminds participants to continue to work on their health and enhances social connectedness, ultimately increasing resilience for those recovering from or caring for someone who has experienced a stroke.

The stroke support group is held at Ascension All Saints on the second Wednesday of each month free of charge. Any stroke survivor or caregiver is welcome to attend, regardless of being an Ascension patient. For those who may not be able to attend in person, there is an option to attend the group virtually. To find a support group near you go to American Heart Association's Stroke Support Group Finder at www.stroke.org/en/stroke-support-group-finder.

The Players

Hollie Landreman, RN, stroke coordinator

Laura Madison, recreational therapist

Cara Shaffer, MS, RN, director of Clinical Services, Inpatient

Carol DiRaimondo-Decker, regional director, Rehabilitation Services

Jenny Byrne, manager, Rehabilitation Services

Linda Mills, manager, Rehabilitation Services, Inpatient Rehabilitation Unit

Kathryn Martin, RN, unit lead supervisor, Inpatient Rehabilitation Unit

Brenda Abbott, administrative assistant, Executive Offices


Ascension All Saints

What They Did

Created a Stroke Support Group that meets on the second Wednesday of each month for stroke survivors and caregivers

Find a stroke support group near you!

1. Christensen, E. R., Golden, S. L., & Gesell, S. B. (2019). Perceived Benefits of Peer Support Groups for Stroke Survivors and Caregivers in Rural North Carolina. *North Carolina medical journal*, 80(3), 143–148. <https://doi.org/10.18043/ncm.80.3.143>



“The support group is a community where members can share what they are experiencing in a safe environment.”

– **Hollie Landreman**

About the Meetings

The support group offers a space for members to ask questions, learn more about health, and connect with others sharing similar experiences. Meetings consist of a reflection, presentation or discussion, and time for questions. The topics are determined by participants' requests. Speakers are found within the hospital and community to discuss a variety of topics, which have included information about medication compliance by pharmacists, brain food by dietitians, sleep apnea from a pulmonologist, and mindfulness and meditation from spiritual care. Wisconsin Coverdell community stroke education materials, specifically BE FAST Bella, are shared to remind participants of the signs and symptoms of stroke and importance of calling 911 since those who have had a stroke are at increased risk for another. The support group also provides the opportunity to connect survivors to additional clinical care and community resources.

Lessons Learned

Support from administration and leadership and staff engagement are key to successful implementation of the Ascension All Saints' stroke support group. Having multiple departments on board to refer patients to this opportunity increases its reach. Individuals recovering from a stroke in the hospital are also uniquely given the opportunity to join the meetings. The group has collaborated

with social workers, occupational therapists, local aging and disability resource centers, members of the fire department, a neighborhood watch program, and the police department to deliver education and resources. Making connections within and outside of one's organization helps to ensure a well-rounded program.

Furthermore, timing and accessibility must be considered for both staff and participants. To increase opportunities for those who may not have transportation or may be homebound, there is a virtual option for people to attend. The meetings are also transcribed to increase accessibility for those who may be hard of hearing. Ascension continues to adapt to the needs of their patients and community.

Wisconsin Coverdell Stroke Program

The Wisconsin Coverdell Stroke Program works with hospitals, emergency medical services (EMS), and professional and community organizations across the state to support a healthier Wisconsin by improving community awareness and the quality of stroke care. Wisconsin EMS agencies and 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 at <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/coverdell/index.htm>.

