

HEALTH REPORT



The Sentara Stroke Team Generates a Miracle Recovery

Imagine that you stop by a co-worker's desk to find that he can't move his left arm and leg, and his speech is slurred. You look closely and see that the left side of his face is drooping. Do you know what's happening? Luckily for George, his co-workers knew exactly what was happening. George was having a stroke, a condition that's caused by a lack of blood flow to the brain. His co-workers immediately dialed 9-1-1, and he was rushed to the Sentara Northern Virginia Medical Center emergency room. Medical treatment in the early onset phase of George's stroke put the wheels of his miraculous recovery into motion.

Upon arrival at the ER, Sentara's Stroke Team sprang into action. Because they had been alerted by EMS that George was

on his way under what they call a "Code Stroke," the team was fully prepared to provide immediate care. George's team included a physician, nurses, medical techs, radiologists, and pharmacists. Within minutes the team ordered a CT scan of his head and a CT angiogram of his head and neck. Because of the severity of his condition, his doctors administered Alteplase, a medication that breaks up clots. It's so powerful, it can often hasten and sometimes completely reverse the impact of a stroke on the patient if administered in time.

Despite George's dire condition when he arrived at Sentara, he went home 48 hours later with only a slight facial droop. This reversal of his symptoms happened because of the prompt and accurate care provided by Sentara's Stroke Team.

Strokes have few if any warning signs

A stroke is a condition with sudden onset. Prior to his episode, George was extremely healthy and felt no signs of illness until the stroke happened. Six years prior to the stroke, he did have a heart attack. Having a heart attacked does increase the risk of having a stroke later in life. However, he's careful with his diet, takes a daily aspirin (a measure often prescribed for people who have had a heart attack), and is very physically active. He is an avid cyclist and last year participated in two 100-mile races.

The role of the caregiver during and after a stroke

George had multiple family members present at the hospital during his treatment. The presence of his two daughters was an enormous comfort to him. Having loved ones and caregivers present during a patient's treatment is critical for several reasons. They can tell the medical team exactly what happened and how the patient normally looks and behaves. They serve as a source of pertinent medical history, and they can provide consent to treat if the patient cannot speak or communicate effectively because of his or her medical condition.

A unique approach to stroke care

Jessica Silcox is a registered nurse and the Stroke Coordinator at Sentara. She plays a unique role on the Stroke Team as the liaison between the medical team, the patient, and the patient's caregivers, family, and friends.

"Participating in a Code Stroke can be very scary for patients and families because things move very quickly and decisions have to be made within minutes," said Jessica. "My job as the Stroke Coordinator is to help the patients and families through this process, explain what is going on, and what the next steps are."

George's daughters and his girlfriend, Lisa, were integral to his care. Lisa confirmed how valuable Jessica was during and after George's treatment.

"I arrived at the ER soon after George," said Lisa. "The whole staff in the ER and ICU was flawless. It felt like a family. If we needed anything, the staff provided it. Jessica made herself completely available and was a constant figure in George's hospital room during his stay."

The key to Sentara's high-quality treatment of stroke lies in its thoughtful and thorough protocols. Handling a stroke patient is a well-designed process at Sentara. The process is engrained in the entire team so that the actions are automatic. These protocols, combined with George's quick thinking co-workers who immediately recognized the signs of stroke, helped George make a miraculous and rapid recovery.

"I can't overstate just how cool it is to see the medicine work in front of your eyes," said Jessica. "Once you participate in a stroke case with this kind of result, it's very difficult not to get excited about the potential to save lives through effective stroke care."

Continued support for patients and loved ones after discharge

Once a stroke patient is cleared to go home, the care from Sentara continues.

"What has surprised me most is that Sentara has called me several times to follow up on my treatment and care," said George.

The Sentara team provided reading materials to Lisa and George to help them cope and manage his remaining recovery at home. These materials helped them understand what they could expect as George continued to heal. They are still in touch with Jessica, who they know truly cares about George and how he's doing. Jessica is quick to affirm that sentiment.

George's life now

George had his stroke just over a month ago. Three weeks after the stroke, George and Lisa took their planned vacation to Florida. George recently rode his bike for a total of 35 miles in a weekend and feels great. He's also returned to work and is spending time with his daughters.

The blood clot that caused the stroke was completely gone prior to his discharge though it did leave minimal permanent damage to his brain that Lisa notices in his demeanor from time to time.

"He gets overwhelmed easier," she said. "He's sometimes slow to react, but his body is still healing. He has made some changes in his diet and is dedicated to a full recovery and to preventing a future stroke."

In the aftermath of the stroke, George has become even more attuned to his body and committed to his health.

"I am feeling great now," he said. "I realize that I am a very fortunate man. Without the Sentara team pushing and motivating me, I don't think I would be able to accomplish so much four weeks after suffering a stroke. As a result, I am eating even healthier and listening to my body. I can ride 15 miles on my bike one month after having a stroke. I think that's amazing."



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George and Lisa at a Washington Nationals game one month after George's stroke.