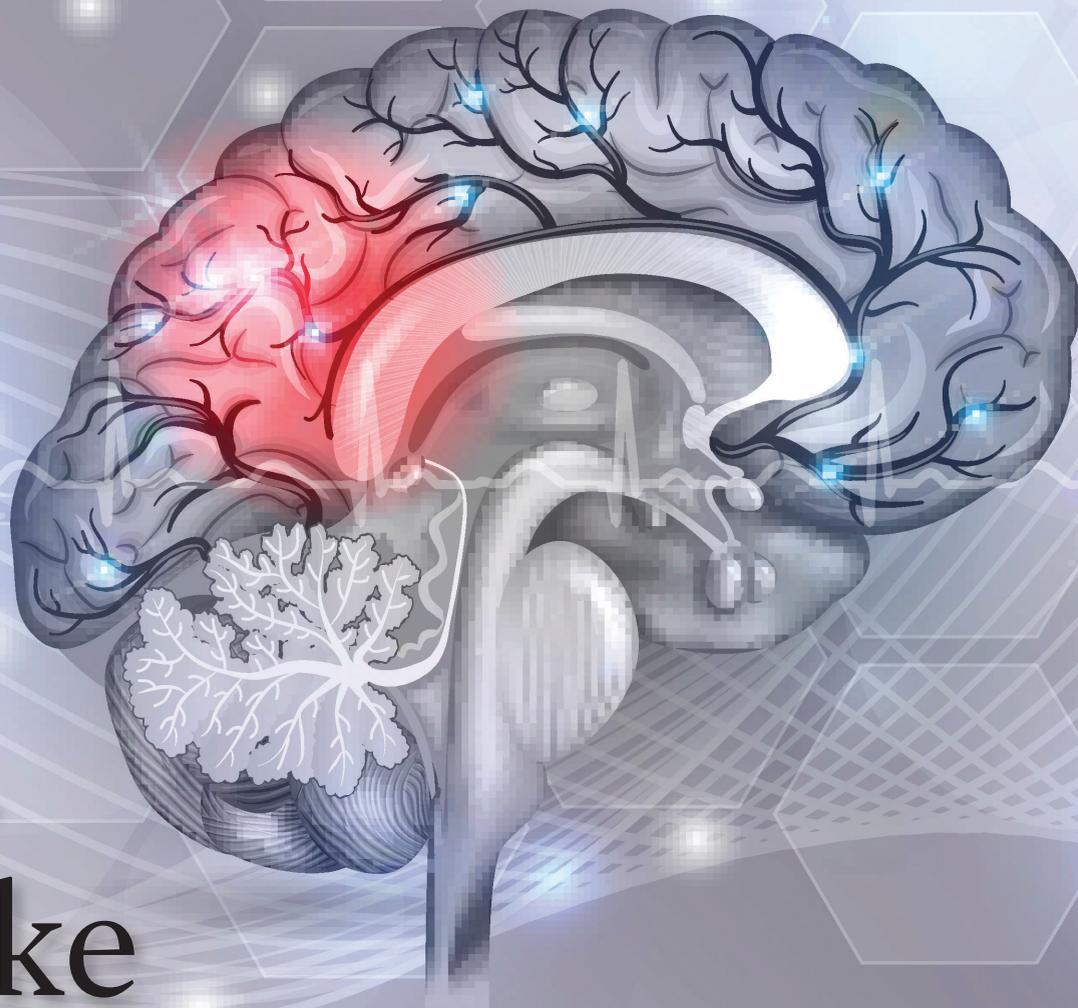


Life *After* Stroke



When Cami Roberts, an H2U coordinator in Ogden, Utah, showed up to work one morning in May 2015, little did she know that a brain attack was about to change her life.

Roberts was going about her busy day at Ogden Regional Medical Center when she suddenly developed a severe headache and passed out. Lucky for her, she worked just minutes from the emergency room, and within seven minutes was being examined and treated.

“I was very fortunate that I had my stroke before I left work,” she says. “I could have been driving home and caused an accident.”

Roberts was only 54 years old when she suffered her hemorrhagic stroke, a type of stroke caused when a blood vessel in the brain bursts and bleeds into the brain. Though Roberts had been taking arthritis medications that can

increase the possibility of stroke, she didn’t consider her risk to be very high.

“I was hit from behind with the stroke,” she says. “I went from doing everything myself to being bedridden for five days and then in rehab for 13 days.”

Still, Roberts is grateful that her recovery went as well as it did. The fatality rate for hemorrhagic strokes is higher than for other types of stroke, and the outcomes are often poorer. Victims of these types of strokes can experience a wide range of problems, including paralysis, speech problems, cognitive difficulties and more. In Roberts’ case, her speech and comprehension were affected most.

Early in recovery, she recalls struggling at times with daily tasks like making dinner because she couldn’t understand the recipes. Even now, she finds communication can be challenging.

“I often have to think about things before I say them, and I don’t talk much if in a crowd because I get my words mixed up.”



“Going back to work was the best kind of therapy because it made me think for myself.”

- Cami Roberts

TIME IS BRAIN

Getting immediate attention after her stroke probably had a lot to do with how well Roberts has recovered. Patients who receive care within three hours of noticing stroke symptoms typically have less disability three months afterward than those whose care is delayed, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Recognizing and treating stroke quickly can help prevent death and minimize the brain damage that can cause long-term disability, explains Harmeet Sachdev, MD, director of the Comprehensive Stroke Center at Good Samaritan Hospital, an HCA Healthcare hospital in San Jose, California.

“The brain is a very sensitive organ, and brain tissue begins to die quickly,” explains Dr. Sachdev, who was one of the first physicians in California to render tissue plasminogen activator (tPA) treatment, an FDA-approved drug that breaks up blood clots responsible for ischemic strokes.



Harmeet Sachdev, MD

Emergency room physicians aim to diagnose and treat all stroke patients within a four-and-a-half hour window of the onset of their symptoms. That’s because nearly 1.9 million neurons die for each minute stroke goes untreated, according to the journal *Stroke*. Medical providers describe this with the pithy phrase “time is brain.”

Fortunately, Roberts returned to work part time at the HCA Healthcare hospital.

“Going back to work was the best kind of therapy because it made me think for myself,” she says, adding that she’s glad she works part time since she still has occasional bouts of fatigue. “Healing the brain from a hemorrhagic stroke takes time, so I nap when I get home from work.

“I feel blessed that I can still do all the things that most people who have had a hemorrhagic stroke can’t do,” she says, adding that she had wonderful support from her family.

CAN YOU SPOT A STROKE?



FACE
DROOPING



ARM
WEAKNESS



SPEECH
DIFFICULTY



TIME
TO CALL 9-1-1



FOCUSED ON PREVENTION

Stroke is the No. 1 cause of adult disability in the United States. But there’s good news: About 80% of strokes are preventable, according to the Stroke Awareness Foundation.

“The biggest piece of advice I can give is to prevent the stroke from happening in the first place,” says Dr. Sachdev. “Take care of your health and control risk factors like high blood pressure and cholesterol. Don’t downplay the consequences of smoking, stress, obesity or diabetes. And make healthy food choices, like poultry, fish and vegetables instead of too much red meat or pasta.”

Paula Slater, an H2U member at HCA Healthcare’s MountainView Hospital in Las Vegas, is also a big advocate for stroke prevention. Since suffering a massive ischemic stroke in 2011 that affected her left leg, arm and hand and made her dependent on a wheelchair, Slater says she uses “food as medicine” to take care of her body. Besides eating a healthy diet, she also makes sure to drink plenty of water, exercise regularly and get quality sleep.

“My brain and my body have healed considerably,” she says. “Now when I meet people, they say, ‘If you weren’t in a wheelchair, we would never know you had a stroke.’”

STAYING POSITIVE

Slater is in a good place today but admits recovery hasn’t been easy. After her stroke, she was determined to get moving and back to her pre-stroke self as much as possible. However, she wrestled with anxiety and panic attacks, which is common for stroke survivors.

“You’re not the same person you were before,” Slater says. “When your brain is affected, it impacts your entire person. You basically have to reinvent yourself—like Madonna does every 10 years.”

Antidepressants helped her combat anxiety, but Slater also integrated music therapy, meditation and prayer into her daily routine. On the walls of her home and office, she



“I look for the little victories and focus on what I have, rather than what I don’t have.”

– Paula Slater

hung visual reminders to stay positive. One of her favorites is an excerpt from a Winston Churchill speech: “Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never.”

“I look at that quote every day and it motivates me,” she



HCA Healthcare Is Beating the Clock to Save Lives

Stroke is one of the most time-sensitive conditions in all of medicine. The quicker a stroke is recognized and treated, the better the chances that long-term brain damage or death can be prevented. And HCA Healthcare hospitals are responding to stroke 30% faster on average than the national guidelines set by the American Heart Association and American Stroke Association.

These two organizations recommend hospitals strive for a 60-minute door-to-needle (DTN) time for stroke patients. DTN is the window of time that emergency care providers have to administer intravenous medication that dissolves a life-threatening blood clot. At HCA Healthcare hospitals, DTN averages just 42 minutes. The health system has been able to improve performance by using an assessment tool created by its neuroscience team to screen potential stroke patients as soon as they arrive in the emergency room.

“Our industry-leading stroke performance is a product of our talented physicians and hospital teams coupled with the power of HCA Healthcare’s scale,” explains Kevin Orndorff, HCA Healthcare’s vice president of neuroscience.

says. “I look for the little victories and focus on what I have, rather than what I don’t have.”

Throughout her recovery, Slater has also been fixated on learning everything she can about the brain.

“I decided I was going to take charge of my health,” she says. “I read everything I could get my hands on about brain plasticity and how to heal my mind and body. By now, I like to joke that I should be a neurosurgeon because I’ve learned so much about brain health.”

In the nine years since her stroke, Slater has been sharing her hard-won knowledge with others. She has mentored stroke survivors through ShareGivers, a stroke support program sponsored by H2U at MountainView. Created by the American Stroke Association and the American Heart Association, ShareGivers connects hospitalized stroke patients with survivors like Slater, who know what they are going through and can offer encouragement during recovery. Slater continually seeks out gadgets that help with mobility and shares them on her website, New Life Now (www.newlifenowlv.com).

Slater attributes most of her recovery—both then and now—to her optimistic mindset.

“It starts with your attitude and perspective,” she says. “There is always a solution if you want the solution more than the problem.” ■