

Expert stroke care leads to quick recovery

Graphic specialist designs own story



For two decades, Jeanice Blood has worked at St. Luke's Hospital. Many of those years have been helping tell the stories of eastern Iowans who sought care at St. Luke's. The 52-year-old is a graphic specialist working in the hospital's Marketing Communications Department. One of her duties is to design the pages of this magazine. It never entered her mind that one day she would be designing her own "Healthbeat" story.

"I find it very ironic," said Blood. "You never think a medical emergency is going to happen to you but I'm proof it does and it changes your life."

Blood woke up on a Sunday morning in January to get ready for a bridal shower. She could barely walk without falling.

Jeanice Blood spends quality time with her grandson Carson near her Cedar Rapids home.

"I had to use my arms to walk down the hallway," said Blood. "I told my sisters I couldn't go to the party and went back to bed. I just remember thinking that I must have an inner ear infection. I had one many years ago and the symptoms were similar."

As the day progressed nausea set in. She remained in bed the rest of the day hoping the illness would pass.

"I'm fairly healthy and work out at a gym several times a week," said Blood. "It just never entered my mind that this was a serious health issue."

But indeed it was. Her husband, Greg, contacted their family doctor Daniel VandenBosch, MD, St. Luke's Westside Family Medicine and he ordered a CT scan. During the scan doctors saw something and immediately ordered her to have an MRI, which would give doctors a better look. The MRI revealed that Blood had a stroke.

There are two types of strokes. The most common is an ischemic stroke, which occurs when arteries are blocked by blood clots or by the gradual build-up of plaque and other fatty deposits.

According to the American Stroke Association about 87 percent of strokes are ischemic. The other kind of stroke is a hemorrhagic stroke, which occurs when a blood vessel in the brain breaks leaking blood into the brain.

"Jeanice had a hemorrhagic stroke," said Craig Dove, DO, St. Luke's Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation medical director. "This type of stroke can occur in different areas of the brain; Jeanice's was in the cerebellum, which is in the back of the brain. The type and area of her stroke is fairly rare. It's likely the result of a blood vessel condition she was born with and in a lot of people it never results in a stroke but if it does it's usually later in life."

Blood was transferred to the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics (UIHC) where she stayed for three days. Once stabilized she was transferred back to St. Luke's Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation to begin therapy.

Intense therapy

"I was having problems with balance and nausea," said Blood. "I was scheduled for physical, occupational and speech therapy right away."

"We customize therapy plans according to each patient's needs," said Dr. Dove. "In occupational therapy patients get help with self care, work in the kitchen and other everyday living needs. Speech therapy assists patients with talking, swallowing and cognitive issues. Physical therapy helps patients with strength, endurance, balance and mobility."

For five days Blood was in what she refers jokingly as therapy boot camp – intense days of therapy. Since St. Luke's practices family-centered care Blood's family was encouraged to participate as much as they could.

"Speech therapy was hard," said Blood. "It was more than talking; they worked with me on short term memory exercises. It was something I was struggling with. In occupational therapy (OT) I shopped at a mock grocery store, baked brownies and worked on a computer. So much of my job at St. Luke's is working at a computer and the therapist was good at incorporating those skills I needed to get me back to work. During physical therapy (PT) I used a machine called the Balance Master, which helped me regain balance."

Blood was discharged from St. Luke's two days earlier than anticipated because she had made good progress. After she returned home Blood continued outpatient therapy at St. Luke's for about a month-and-a-half. She was also given exercises to do on her own to improve her progress.

Return to normal

"The therapists were so good about incorporating the skills I needed to resume my life," Blood said. "They are really good at what they do and very helpful in explaining things and telling me why they were having me perform a specific exercise."

After nearly three months away, Blood gradually returned to work. Today she is back at St. Luke's full-time and happy to be healthy and have such a great outcome.

"I feel really fortunate," said Blood.

"I got such great care from everyone at St. Luke's. We're really lucky to have such expert care in eastern Iowa. I'm also very blessed to have the tremendous family support that I had during my crisis. My family was there for me every step of the way from staying with me in the hospital to driving me to my therapy appointments. I honestly could not have made it as far as I did without their help."

■ To learn more or to watch a video about St. Luke's Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation log on to stlukescr.org.



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Craig Dove, DO
St. Luke's Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation medical director

Stroke warning signs

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg – especially on one side of the body
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes

Source: American Stroke Association