

Rehabilitation after stroke

Regional leader returns patients to daily living

Alice and Dean Stegman have been married for 57 years. They do just about everything together – running a small business and working at their son’s blind company. Like most married couples, they have come to depend on each other for the big and little things in life.

“Last fall, we were leaving our son Jeffrey’s business and Alice asked me to drive,” said Dean. “She mentioned she was having some problems with her vision. At the time we didn’t think much

of it because it wasn’t the first time she reported what she described as seeing broken windows, which impacted her vision.”

The Stegman’s arrived home and Dean went into the garage for a few minutes; when he returned, Alice was in a chair, unable to speak. Dean immediately dialed 9-1-1.

Area Ambulance rushed Alice, 76, to St. Luke’s Emergency Department where

it was determined she suffered a stroke. Alice was immediately given Tissue Plasminogen Activator (TPA), which is a clot-busting drug. It’s approved for use in certain patients having a heart attack or stroke. The drug can dissolve blood clots, which cause most heart attacks and strokes. TPA is the only drug approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for the urgent treatment of ischemic stroke.

Alice Stegman works with Occupational Therapist Barb West as part of her outpatient therapy at St. Luke’s.





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Ryan Dowden, MD
St. Luke’s Emergency Department

Dr. Ryan Dowden in the St. Luke’s ambulance bay, which provides a separate entrance for patients like Alice Stegman who arrive more urgently by ambulance.

“In order for TPA to be most effective patients need to receive the drug in the first three hours after the start of symptoms,” said Ryan Dowden, MD, St. Luke’s ER doctor. “It is very important for people who think they’re having a stroke to seek help immediately. If it’s given promptly, TPA can significantly reduce the effects of stroke and reduce permanent disability.”

“Her care in the St. Luke’s Emergency Department was really incredible,” said Dean. “The doctors and nurses moved quickly to take care of Alice. I felt they did everything they could to address her needs.”

Physical rehabilitation

Once stabilized, Alice spent a couple of days in a private room before starting rehabilitation at St. Luke’s, which included physical, occupational and speech therapy.

Completely renovated last year, St. Luke’s Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation inpatient unit is accredited by CARF, the rehabilitation accreditation commission. This accreditation means patients are assured the highest quality of services possible and that St. Luke’s delivers the best possible outcomes

for patients. In addition, St. Luke’s has earned the CARF inpatient rehabilitation stroke specialty accreditation.

After nearly two weeks of undergoing rehabilitation, Alice was released from St. Luke’s with orders to continue her therapies on an outpatient basis.

“When I first saw Alice she needed quite a bit of assistance,” said Barb West, St. Luke’s occupational therapist. “She needed help standing, dressing and was unable to scan with her eyes to the right.”

“We worked on getting Alice to scan more often to the right before she takes a step to make sure there isn’t something in her way,” said Michelle Langston, St. Luke’s physical therapist. “Alice also had some balance issues initially. As a result, we’ve done a lot of work with her on a machine called the Balance Master and she’s made tremendous gains. Her balance is much better and that’s good for her overall safety.”

“Alice has difficulty naming things,” said Angie Brace, St. Luke’s speech therapist. “When I first saw her – Alice’s naming of common objects was at 53 percent, today she’s at 86 percent – that’s good improvement. Alice comes to therapy ready to work hard and her husband is

supportive too. I am working with Dean to educate him on how he can assist Alice at home to further her improvement.”

“One of the things Alice wants to do is return to her normal schedule,” said West. “Alice has come a long way in the short time I have been working with her. She has made good progress since the initial stroke. We will continue our work with the goal of improving Alice’s quality of life.”

“I continue to see improvements,” said Alice. “My goal is to return to working in the front office of my son’s business and to help Dean with the bookkeeping at our custom drapery business. I’m not there yet, but the work I’m doing at St. Luke’s is helping me resume some of the things I enjoy.”

“Everyone at St. Luke’s is very helpful,” said Dean. “Obviously this is all new to us and we didn’t know what to expect, but I feel like Alice is getting the best care possible.”

■ **To schedule a tour of St. Luke’s Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, call 319/369-7331 or visit stlukescr.org to take a virtual tour.**