

HEALTH REPORT



The gift of a stroke

Lee Stroy was excited for Christmas in 2014. His family was making their way from Florida to D.C. to celebrate the holiday, and Lee couldn't wait to welcome them. Healthy, strong, and active, Lee is a loving husband and father to five incredible children. He made a handsome living as a stagehand in 2014 after spending many years working behind a desk in a corporate environment. Lee felt so fortunate. At 37, all aspects of his life had finally fallen into place.

And then, everything changed

On the morning of December 23, Lee woke up with a numb feeling on his left side. He thought for a moment he had just

slept in an odd position. He got out of bed and couldn't walk. His left leg kept slipping, and he couldn't put any weight on it. He made his way downstairs by pulling himself along. He wasn't panicked, but he was confused. When he called out for his wife, Keturah, he realized he couldn't speak. All he could do was moan. His wife thought he was being silly. When he finally made his way to her, she turned around and looked at him. The look of terror on her face said everything: something was terribly wrong with Lee. She called 911.

The emergency room

Lee was quickly transported to Sentara Northern Virginia

Medical Center (SNVMC), a certified Primary Stroke Center. Given Lee's symptoms, the Prince William Emergency Response Team, who receive in-depth annual training on the signs and symptoms of stroke, phoned the emergency room en-route to the hospital. The call from the field enabled SNVMC's Stroke Team to mobilize in advance of Lee's arrival to the emergency room. At SNVMC, Lee and his family received confirmation that he had a stroke.

"With a stroke, time is everything," Jessica Silcox, SNVMC's Stroke Coordinator, is quick to say. "Thinking and acting fast with a stroke can be the difference between whether or not you end up with a permanent disability, but also in some cases can be the difference between life and death." Jessica explained that the quick action that Lee and his wife took on the morning of December 23, 2014, saved his life.

In one day, all of his symptoms had disappeared. To look at him, no one would know anything was wrong. Lee woke up on the morning of December 25 expecting to go home and celebrate Christmas with his family.

And then, everything changed, again.

Round 2

Instead of opening gifts, Lee and his family spent Christmas morning learning that he had suffered two additional strokes. He wasn't going anywhere. During the week of Christmas, Jessica Silcox, whom Lee now refers to as his guardian angel, arranged for him to transfer to a rehabilitation facility. He was transferred on December 31. While the whole world was popping champagne corks and singing Auld Lang Syne, Lee began 2015 facing his new reality.



The Stroke Team at Sentara Northern Virginia Medical Center

The truth about stroke

Though dramatic, Lee's stroke isn't unique; sadly, it's all too common. In hindsight, there were warning signs. For about a year prior to his first stroke, Lee had experienced extremely painful headaches. He would wake up in the middle of the night drenched in sweat. His wife finally convinced him to see a doctor, and he was diagnosed with hypertension. The doctor prescribed medication and Lee decided to hold off on starting it until after Christmas so he could thoroughly enjoy the holiday season with his family. In addition to having high blood pressure, he also had high cholesterol and diabetes, was a smoker, and is African American. Combined, all of these factors dramatically increase the risk of stroke.

"At first, I was in denial," Lee said. "I thought strokes were for old people. Then reality set in. I just wanted things to get back to normal. But that wasn't going to happen. Now I have a new normal."

Lee began to realize what that new normal looked like during the winter of 2015 as he and his two daughters trudged through the snow on their way to school. He had to give up the idea of getting back to his lucrative job as a stagehand. His family now had to adjust to a single income. His youngest daughter had to be pulled from day care to save money. Since Lee could no longer drive, and his wife needed to be at work, his youngest daughter now walked with him as he took his other daughter to school.

"We walked slow," Lee said. "Really slow because I was still recovering. It was so cold. And my daughters understood. They were incredible through it, and that helped me. I was determined to take care of myself so I could take care of them. I had no time to wallow in my sorrow."

That determination has paid off. Though Lee's life is different now, he considers his strokes the very best things that ever happened to him.

"I want to pursue the path of teaching people about strokes," said Lee. "This is the work I'm destined to do. To educate people, to help people recover. Stroke has no color, religion, race, gender, or age. It can affect anyone. Sure, I have bad days. Days when I'm angry and frustrated. But I just tell myself that tomorrow I'm going to get up. Helping others helps me, too. I want to be of service to others who are going through this."

Lee doesn't just talk about making a difference; he does something about it. He dedicates his time to stroke education in communities, particularly among young African-American men. In collaboration with SNVMC and Brain Injury Services of Northern Virginia, Lee works on a special patient task force that focuses on stroke recovery. He also does speaking engagements and has started to write about his experience so that he can reach as many people as possible with his message.

"A few months after my stroke," said Lee, "my cousin told me 'Lee, you're built for this.' I didn't understand what he meant at the time, but now I do. At my last appointment, my doctor told me I might never be the same as I was before the stroke. And you know what? That's great because I don't want to be the way I was before my strokes. I want to be better."

For more information about strokes, please visit the American Stroke Association website at stroke.org.



Lee Stroy, Patient
Sentara Northern Virginia Medical Center

Every second counts
when you or your loved one has a stroke.

The Certified Stroke Team at Sentara works seamlessly with emergency medical responders to ensure expedient care.

Fight Stroke with Sentara:

- Fast diagnosis of stroke – result of stroke team collaboration including emergency room physicians and stroke specialists
- Expert neurologists and 24-hour access to interventional neuroradiology
- Specialized stroke training for local emergency personnel

Why does this matter?

Time is Brain. As a DNV Certified Stroke Center since 2012, Sentara Northern Virginia Medical Center has met stringent clinical criteria to provide expert stroke care to our community.

Signs of Stroke:

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

For more information
Call 1-800-SENTARA or log on to Sentara.com