

A Stroke Survivor's Story Christopher Robson



“My legs were wobbly and my mouth, I couldn’t talk right, it felt numb and floppy,” said Christopher Robson of that day in March when suddenly nothing in his world felt right. “I knew something was ‘electrically’ different,” he said. Standing in his workshop in his garage, reaching for a battery charger, his arm felt “super-glued, like a big blob of dead fish.” He didn’t fall but lowered himself to the ground and called his wife to contact 911 and then his daughter to help him.

Robson, age 51, was having a stroke.

The EMS crew knew instantly what was going on, said Robson, who lives in Honesdale. “They had this energy, very focused, like they knew the clock was ticking.” When a stroke occurs, minutes count-- every minute lost means loss of brain tissue or function.

The ambulance’s EMTs (Emergency Medical Technicians) had already alerted Wayne Memorial Hospital, which is a certified primary stroke center. When Robson arrived, the Stroke Alert Response Team was ready for him. Within minutes, he was given a CT scan to determine what type of stroke he was having and then set up via teleconference with a board-certified neurologist from Geisinger Health System.

“They gave me tPA and then took me to the helipad,” Robson remembered, “it all happened really fast.”

Tissue Plasminogen Activator (tPA) helps in restoring blood flow to the brain –“it’s also called a clot buster drug,” said Stanley Skonieczki, MD, the medical director of Wayne Memorial’s Emergency Department. “As a certified primary stroke center, we are authorized to

administer this life-saving drug when appropriate, but to be effective, it must be given within three hours, or up to four-and-half hours, after the onset of symptoms.”

“It was ‘crystal clear’ to me that everyone at Wayne Memorial knew exactly what they were doing,” said Robson, adding, “I am a manufacturing engineer, and believe me, I can sense when something is not right with the team in the room. There was none of that. These folks had everything under control. And because of that, I really wasn’t scared or uncomfortable.”

Robson was life-flighted to Geisinger Wyoming Valley where he underwent a breakthrough type of surgical procedure called “stent retrieval thrombectomy” to restore blood flow to the brain. During this procedure, a catheter is threaded into an artery at the groin and up through the neck, until it reaches the blood clot causing the stroke. Using x-ray guided imaging, a “stent retriever” is inserted into the catheter. The stent reaches past the clot, expands to stretch the walls of the artery so blood may flow, and a clot is “retrieved.” Removing blood clots from the brain leads to better outcomes for stroke patients.

The procedure is performed under conscious or moderate sedation.

“I was awake and it hurt like heck! But I’m here today because of all the teamwork and fast thinking by Wayne Memorial’s staff. Really, I can’t thank them enough.”

Later, Robson was transferred to the Wayne Memorial-Good Shepherd Rehabilitation Center to undergo intense physical therapy.

What brought on the stroke? While there are well-known risk factors, Robson said he doesn’t fall into any of the usual categories. For example, he doesn’t have high blood pressure or a history of smoking. What about a family history? “Odd thing is, my sister had a stroke, too, on the same day as I did—March 12th.” Robson said he and his medical advisers are still not sure what brought on the stroke, but they are looking at everything, including any possible cardiac issues that may not have been fully identified.

Today, less than a month after his stroke, Robson is in outpatient occupational and speech therapy at Wayne Memorial Hospital’s Delaware Street Rehab facility. During a recent visit, accompanied by his wife, Wayne Highlands High School Band Director Betty Ann, Robson reiterated how thankful he was. “The staff training in the hospital’s E-R really showed through, and I’m grateful for that.”

Christopher Robson did the right thing: he did not ignore his symptoms. He called for help rather than hoping things would just go away. If you or somebody you know experiences the signs of stroke, call 911 immediately. Think of the FAST acronym: Facial drooping, Arm weakness, Speech difficulty = Time to call for help!