

Stroke Team Vital in Patient's Recovery

Sitting in a doctor's office in Athens, Tennessee, David Martin was hearing the exact opposite of what he had expected. He was there for clearance to go back to work after a lengthy illness.

Instead of releasing Martin for work, the doctor ordered him to go to Parkwest Medical Center. "My heart rate was running real high," Martin says. "It was, like, 170 when it had always been around 70."

At Parkwest, Martin was diagnosed with a malfunctioning aortic valve, a problem he was born with but wasn't aware of until the diagnosis.

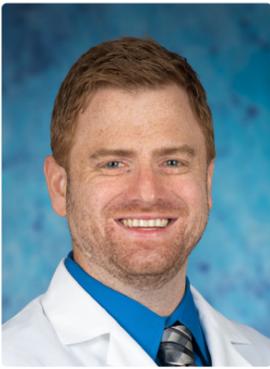
The day before Martin's heart surgery, there was a shocking complication. "I woke up, and I knew everything I wanted to say, but when I was talking it wasn't coming out that way," Martin says. "It was really scary."

Martin was suffering a stroke.

A Team Approach

In addition to being a top-rated heart hospital, Parkwest has received advanced certification from The Joint Commission as an Advanced Primary Stroke Center. This means physicians and staff are specially trained to diagnose and treat patients who experience stroke symptoms any time of day or night.

"Our own integrated team of in-house neuro-



Robert Malka, MD



Patrick Flynn, PA-C



Tennille Creekmore, RN



Christy Oakes, RN

ogists, emergency physicians and highly trained nursing staff are equipped to provide rapid care for patients presenting with stroke or other neurological emergencies," says Parkwest neurologist Robert Malka, MD. "We use advanced imaging and streamlined processes to ensure accurate diagnosis and expedite treatment."

Parkwest stroke team coordinator Tennille Creekmore, RN, says the hospital is part of the Covenant Health Stroke Network. "Our health system func-

tions as an integrated team, allowing us to provide the full range of treatment options for neurologic emergencies as efficiently as possible. Having this capability at all facilities ensures that patients have fast and nearby access to this potentially lifesaving treatment in all of our communities."

Creekmore says their approach relies on a close knit team of dedicated providers, "from paramedics and nurses to ER physicians and neurology specialists" who provide a full



David Martin on the road to recovery.

range of treatment options for neurologic emergencies in the most effective way.

"Patients presenting to Parkwest with acute stroke symptoms who are eligible for clot-busting medication receive it on average in 30 minutes. This is faster than the national average and places us among the most efficient stroke centers in the country."

Heart of the Matter

"I noticed that Mr. Martin was having a difficult time speaking, which was a change from his status the previous day," says Christy Oakes, RN. "After

a thorough evaluation, we followed our 'code stroke' protocol and ordered an immediate CT scan."

The scan, reviewed by stroke team member Patrick Flynn, PA-C, showed Martin was experiencing an acute stroke. He was quickly transferred to Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center, which is certified as a Comprehensive Stroke Center with capabilities for treating complex strokes.

Just a little while later, Martin was undergoing a clot-removal procedure. He was wide awake the whole time, and suddenly his babble turned into sen-

sible words.

"As soon as the doctor removed the clot I could start talking," Martin says. "I don't know why or how that was affecting me, but it was. I started talking to them while I was still on the table where they were working on me."

Complete Care

When Martin arrived back at Parkwest, work began to keep his heart rate in check. Open heart surgery was then performed to replace his aortic valve.

"The people that I dealt with, the nurses and doctors and all, they were amazing," Martin says. "They were really nice. I couldn't have asked for any better."

A few days later, Martin was sent home to recover. Despite being on lockdown because of COVID-19, he was still able to access the care he needed.

His first appointment with the cardiologist after the surgery was a telehealth visit. Martin found he could connect with his cardiologist through a smartphone.

His recovery continues today, and Martin is aware that he's lucky to be alive. "I feel like I've got a guardian angel," Martin says, "a real good one."

To learn more about cardiology services at Parkwest Medical Center and the Covenant Health Stroke Network, visit [TreatedWell.com](https://www.treatedwell.com).

Know the Signs

Strokes happen when the flow of blood to the brain is stopped. It's important to get help as quickly as possible to restore the blood flow and avoid long-term damage.

"BE FAST" is a short acronym that can be used as a checklist if a stroke is suspected. Call 9-1-1 if you come across someone who experiences any of these symptoms:

B - Balance (sudden loss of balance, inability to walk straight)

E - Eyes (loss of vision in one or both eyes)

F - Face (face looks uneven, unequal smile)

A - Arm (arm or leg weak or unable to move)

S - Speech (slurred speech, trouble speaking, inability to speak)

T - Time (note the time and call 9-1-1!)

Remember that fast action and fast access to stroke treatment at a Covenant Health hospital can not only preserve a life, but preserve a patient's quality of life as well. Learn more at [TreatedWell.com/stroke](https://www.treatedwell.com/stroke).

Reducing the Risk

East Tennessee is a great place to live, but it's also in one of the most stroke-prone parts of the nation. The southeastern United States has the highest incidence of stroke in America.

It's important to be vigilant about taking measures to make stroke less likely in your lifetime so you can keep enjoying the good life in your community. A stroke can happen to anyone at any age, but some people are more at risk than others:

- **Age.** Stroke risk increases after age 55.
- **Gender.** Strokes are more common in men, but stroke is more often fatal for women.
- **Race.** African-Americans have a higher risk for death and disability from stroke.
- **History.** Once you've had one stroke, you're more likely to have another.

- **Family history.** If strokes have happened to others in your family, a stroke is more likely to happen to you.
- **Medical history.** Heart disease or abnormalities in the heart, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes and some other medical conditions raise your risk.
- **Climate.** Stroke deaths are most common during extreme temperatures.

Meanwhile, there are some lifestyle changes you can make to help lower your stroke risk:

- Check your blood pressure, and take measures to keep it where it needs to be.
- Eat a healthy diet and make time for heart-healthy exercise.
- Limit alcohol consumption to two drinks per day.
- Quit smoking.
- Never use illegal drugs.
- Have regular checkups with your primary care provider.

If you don't have a primary care doctor, call us today at (865) 374-PARK (7275) and we can help you find one.

Know the signs of stroke:



BALANCE

EYES

FACE

ARMS

SPEECH

TIME

Call 911 if you think you're having a stroke!

[TreatedWell.com/stroke](https://www.treatedwell.com/stroke)