

The Sound of Silence

Patient returns to music and ministry after quick action by stroke team at Fort Sanders Regional

Music rolls across the airwaves from a Sweetwater radio station. As the broadcast encourages listeners to rejoice, the woman at the microphone may be rejoicing more than anyone else.

Brenda Gentry, 68, is a Methodist minister and lifelong resident of Loudon. She is also a stroke survivor.

A quick decision to go to Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center immediately after her stroke symptoms appeared allowed her to keep the music in her life.

Unexpected Trouble

The only sign of trouble had been what Gentry describes as “a gray circle” in her vision. The stroke hit while she was working in the garden on a summer day, and she never saw it coming.

“We were gathering corn,” Gentry says, “I was laying it on my left arm and it kept rolling off. I’d pick it up and lay it back on my arm, and it would roll off again.”

Then, while bending over, Gentry tumbled to the ground. She asked her husband to help her get back up, but he told her to stay put.

He recognized stroke symptoms and knew his wife needed help immediately. He shouted to their son, who called 911.

Gentry began to fully understand something was terribly wrong. “I was in a panic,” she says. “I just didn’t know



Brenda Gentry was afraid she might never play guitar again, but speedy treatment at Fort Sanders Regional kept the music in her life.

if I was going to live or die or be paralyzed.”

Excellence in Stroke Treatment

At the recommendation of the EMTs who transported her, Gentry was rushed to Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center, a designated comprehensive stroke and rehabilitation center. That means Fort Sanders Regional is one of a select number of hospitals specially equipped to give a higher level of care to stroke patients.

At the hospital, she was evaluated quickly. A nurse offered calm reassurance during the process of assessing Gentry’s condition.

“The nurse asked me to squeeze her hand,” Gentry

says. “My brain thought I was squeezing, but I looked down and my hand was just laying there. Then I started crying.”

Dark thoughts rushed through her mind about how the stroke could change her quality of life. And without the use of her left hand, she would never be able to play the guitar or the piano again.

The thought was unbearable. As her tears fell, the nurse compassionately offered reassurance. Gentry had every reason to feel hopeful, because she had made it to the hospital quickly enough to receive an injection of recombinant tissue plasminogen activator (tPA). Fort Sanders Regional neurohospitalist Kathleen Ward, DO, says it’s

the gold standard treatment for acute strokes caused by blood clots for patients who fit the criteria.

“The FDA-approved treatment initiated in 1995 is tPA, a ‘clot buster’ to help open the blockage in the vessel causing the stroke,” Dr. Ward says. “This is available for the first three hours after the symptoms start. For a few patients who meet the criteria, the treatment window is extended to four and a half.”

Gentry squeezed the

nurse’s hand. The tPA had worked and no further treatment was needed.

A Life Restored

During a stroke, time is brain. Dr. Ward says getting to the hospital quickly can make a dramatic difference for anyone experiencing a stroke.

“For some patients, clot retrieval has been known to occur up to 24 hours after symptoms start,” Dr. Ward says, “but as always, the sooner the patient arrives to the emergency department the better, because brain cells are lost every minute of delay.”

After spending some time in the hospital to be moni-

tored and assessed, Gentry was discharged to go back home and back to life. She was able to walk, talk and use her left hand again.

That meant Gentry was able to return to ministry and the music she loves. As her fingers touched the keys of the piano and the strings of her guitar, she rejoiced.

“It was just a miracle and I praise the Lord for life and for not being paralyzed and for the great team at Fort Sanders Regional,” Gentry says. “The care at Fort Sanders Regional was exceptional from the moment I rolled in till the moment I walked out.”



“I just played chords and rejoiced,” says Brenda Gentry, recalling the first time she played music after recovering from a stroke.

Know Your Risk

A stroke can happen to anyone at any time, and some people are more at risk than others. The good news is that many risk factors can be altered with the right treatment or lifestyle changes.

Studies have shown that people who live in the southeastern part of the U.S. are more likely to experience stroke, and so are those who live where there are extreme temperatures.

Strokes are more common in women than men, people who are older than 55, African Americans and

those who have a family history of stroke. You’re also at a higher risk of having a second stroke after you’ve had your first one.

If you’re experiencing stroke symptoms, don’t wait. A stroke doesn’t go away on its own. Getting medical care immediately is critical because the brain needs a constant supply of oxygen and nutrients to work the way it should.

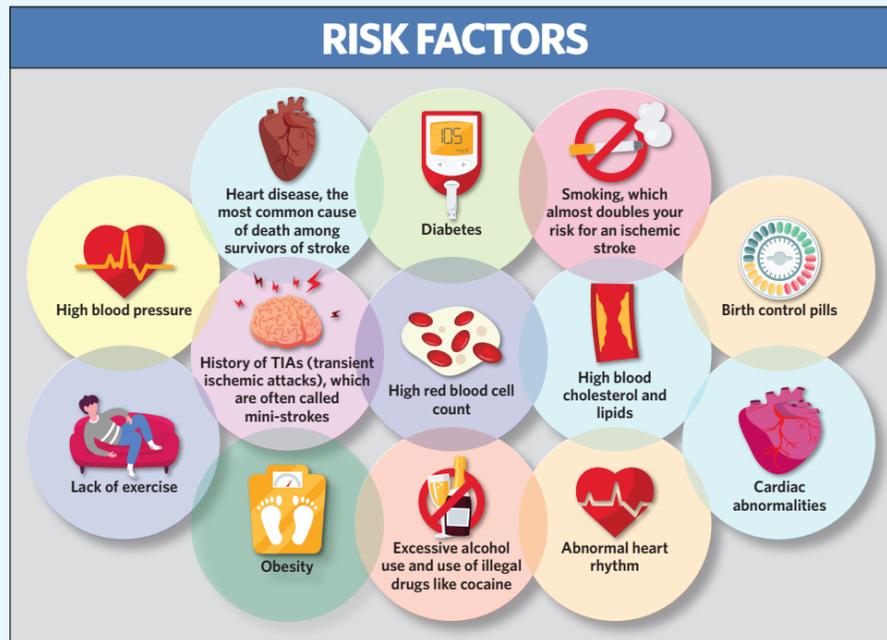
Fort Sanders Regional neurohospitalist Kathleen Ward, DO, says if blood supply is blocked, brain cells begin to die within

minutes. When brain cells die, brain function is lost.

“It is estimated that approximately two million neurons are lost every minute,” Dr. Ward says. “Time is of the essence.”

If a stroke patient isn’t treated quickly, there’s a much greater chance for permanent damage.

To lower your risk, keep up with medical appointments and take care of yourself. Time spent on your health and wellness is more than an investment in your health. It’s an investment in your future, too.



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Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center
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