

Health News From Cleveland County HealthCare System

STROKE RECOVERY

Don Blanton impressed everyone with his determination

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SHELBY – Don Blanton was an active, athletic man who worked hard and played hard until last spring when a stroke stopped him in his tracks.

He was in a coma. His family gathered, planning for the worst. Then he woke up and surprised them all. After nearly three weeks in the hospital, Blanton moved to a short-term rehabilitation facility. He was unable to move his left side, walk or even sit up without help from the staff.

Today, working with the staff at Cleveland Regional Medical Center's (CRMC) Cleveland Regional Rehab (CRR), he is back on his feet and making strides that even his doctors weren't sure he could achieve. "The doctors and nurses said that by all medical reason, I shouldn't have made it to the hospital," said Blanton, "and that if I left the hospital I probably wouldn't have any function."

Blanton isn't alone in his journey to recover from a stroke. More than six million people each year suffer from strokes, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Stroke is the third most common cause of death in the United States, and is the leading cause of long-term disability.

When a stroke occurs, time is a factor. CRMC's Level III trauma center or Kings Mountain Hospital's emergency department are members of the Carolinas Stroke Network, a comprehensive network of hospitals within the Carolinas HealthCare System that provides rapid, state-of-the-art treatment to patients suffering an acute stroke.

Patients arriving at either will be diagnosed and treated according to national guidelines for emergency stroke care, giving them the best opportunity for a good outcome.

Through the Carolinas Stroke Network, emergency department staff can contact a regional referral neurologist to help assess the patient. Brain scanning results can be instantly shared with the neurologist through an electronic medical records system. When necessary, the patient can be transferred to one of the network's two comprehensive stroke centers.

When he was discharged from the rehab facility, Blanton's focus was getting home. Once there, however, it didn't take him long to figure out that



The staff at Cleveland Regional Rehab use a variety of exercises to help Blanton regain the use of his left leg and arm.



he needed help to recover. "I thought I could accomplish this on my own. I soon figured out that I couldn't. The best thing I ever did was coming to Cleveland Regional Rehab."

Blanton's wife Beth, who often comes from work during her lunch hour to watch his rehab sessions, is glad to have a rehab facility in the community. "The convenience of being able to come here has been great," she said. "Friends and family members have helped me get him to the sessions or pick him up."

The stroke affected Blanton's vision and left him paralyzed on his left side. He had no movement in his left leg, arm or fingers. One of his biggest problems was balance. He couldn't sit up on the side of a bed. Every time he tried, he fell sideways.

His arm muscles had gotten so weak that his left arm was useless. "Gravity had pulled the humerus bone (the long bone in the arm that extends from shoulder to elbow) down, away from the joint," said Amanda Hilton, the occupational therapist working with Blanton at CRR. "Our first task was to normalize the muscle tone in that arm."

The therapists used several

methods such as stretching, strengthening exercises, and electrical stimulation to help Blanton regain use of his arm and leg. An electrical stimulation device sends currents of electricity to the muscle through electrodes attached to the body. The electrical currents act like brain signals to tell the muscle to contract. This helps strengthen the muscle and begin to retrain it to respond to messages from the brain.

Once the arm muscles regained some tone, Hilton began using techniques to help the muscles in his arm and hand move without the use of the stimulation device. "He had no movement in his left arm or fingers when we started," said Hilton. "Now he is beginning to move his fingers and arm on his own."

Blanton attends therapy three times per week. During each session he works with Hilton on his arm and hand, and with Sarah McBride, his physical therapist, to retrain his left leg and foot.

McBride is impressed with his progress. "Given his condition when he first began therapy I wasn't sure how much we could accomplish, but Don is the most determined patient

I've ever had."

Blanton knows his attitude is one key to his success. "I've tried to keep the attitude that I can beat this because life's got to go on. It's not been an easy road but with all the help I've had, it has opened doors again. Amanda and Sarah have been very dedicated and are great motivators."

It doesn't seem that Blanton needs much help with motivation. He even does homework. The therapists taught Mrs. Blanton how to help her husband do exercises at home, and they spend time exercising every night. "He couldn't balance to sit on the side of the bed. He couldn't do anything on his own. It's nothing short of a miracle to see him using his left side now."

"I wish this hadn't happened but it's the cards I've been dealt so I'll take them," said Blanton. "A lot of prayers have been said and God has blessed me."

For more information on rehab services at Cleveland Regional Rehab or Cleveland County HealthCare System visit www.ClevelandCountyHealthCareSystem.org.



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