

## **'These people are friends of mine now.'**

### *Stroke survivor thrives in tailored rehabilitation at OSF HealthCare*

Randy Bingner can't help but tear up when he thinks about where he's been and where he's going.

Where he's been: on Thanksgiving 2023 while visiting family in Nebraska, Bingner suffered a stroke. He remembers waking up with blurred vision that wouldn't go away.

"I couldn't stand. I couldn't walk. I got down on my hands and knees. Everything was circulating and swimming. Very confused," Bingner recalls.

"That was my Thanksgiving morning," he adds with some dry humor.

Where he's going: this summer, he plans a trip to Peru to hike the rugged Amazon territory. Something he never thought possible last November.

In between, the 71-year-old retired attorney and judge from Fisher, Illinois, is regaining his independence through specialized rehabilitation for stroke survivors at OSF HealthCare in nearby Urbana.

### **Stroke certification**

Occupational therapists Caitlin Cleveland and Amber Vedder-Reid and physical therapy assistant Deidre Murphy were among 15 OSF Mission Partners (employees) to recently become certified stroke rehabilitation specialists (CSRS™) through [Neurorecovery Unlimited™](#), which offers continuing education and rehabilitation certification for neuro-related conditions. The certification the OSF Mission Partners took part in was a combination of at-home study and three days of in-person scenarios.

"We would discuss research and different techniques for things such as return of motor function in an upper extremity or improving gait patterns," Cleveland explains. "Then we would immediately practice the new techniques."

The three are now putting their knowledge into practice with stroke survivors. A typical session might include walking heel to toe, throwing a ball off an angled trampoline or pressing light-up buttons to help with vision. Working in front of a mirror has also been proven to help.

"People, especially when they are affected in the arm and leg, really rely on the good limb. That teaches the brain, 'oh, I can just use my good side of the body,'" Cleveland says. "We want to force them to have to rely a little bit on the affected side. For example, force them to use their affected arm to reach for their purse."

And, getting the person's pulse rate up and impacted limbs in motion right away gives them the best shot at recovery, Murphy says. That means some sweat equity, but patients like Bingner are in it for the long haul.

"We could spend the day talking about the therapists here," Bingner says, leaning forward to show conviction. "Constantly zeroing in on things like balance issues that I wasn't totally aware of."

It's important work, given how much a stroke can rob someone of their quality of life.

"We see people with an affected side. They may have some cognitive deficits. They may find it harder to manage money or medication," Cleveland says. "Their gait – how they walk – may be affected. If they

have decreased use of one hand, it's harder for them to take care of themselves, as well as higher level tasks around the house."

Murphy adds, "There can be personality challenges, as well, after a stroke. They can become depressed and impulsive. They lack awareness or self-control. They don't understand their deficits as much. That puts them at risk to hurt themselves."

But the success stories like Bingner are fulfilling.

"He's made great progress," Cleveland says, noting his willingness to try new things.

### **Randy's outlook**

Bingner says there are "why me?" days, but he's determined. He's pledged to continue outpatient rehabilitation and home exercises as long as needed to resume doing the things he loves.

"You learn to keep doing the things that keep you out there and active, but you may have to adapt and find some different ways to do it," he says.

Exhibit A: Bingner moved from riding two-wheeled motorcycles to three-wheelers. He can still enjoy the open road without having to worry about balance as much.

His advice to others in his shoes? Listen to the professionals, give it time and don't give up.

### **Learn more**

Call the OSF facility near you to see if it offers rehabilitation tailored to stroke survivors. For more on how to treat and prevent strokes, visit the [OSF HealthCare website](#).