

Christmas Eve stroke: Rare procedure helps save 6-year-old boy

For many families, Christmas Eve is filled with festive traditions. For the Patton family in 2023, it began like any other holiday evening — sprinkling “reindeer food” on the lawn and spending quality time as a family. But what happened next changed their lives forever.

Preston Patton, who was 6 years old at the time, had just taken some medicine and the family was sitting at the kitchen table in their Pekin, Illinois home.

“Suddenly, he just fell off the chair and was limp. You could tell something was wrong,” recalls Shawn Patton, Preston’s father. “I didn’t think it was a stroke, but I just knew something was wrong.”

Shawn called 9-1-1 immediately. Emergency responders arrived within minutes, and Preston was rushed to the hospital. A scan revealed something few expect to see in a child: a blood clot in the brain. Doctors at OSF HealthCare moved quickly to remove the clot — performing a procedure known as a [thrombectomy](#). Preston would go on to become one of the few children in the world to undergo the life-saving intervention.

Preston’s sister, Carter, played a critical role during the crisis — locking up the family dogs and calling their grandparents while Shawn worked with EMTs to get Preston the help he needed.

A devastating diagnosis

Leading Preston’s care was Sourabh Lahoti, MD, a vascular and interventional neurologist with OSF HealthCare Illinois Neurological Institute (INI), in Peoria, Illinois.

When Preston arrived at the hospital, a team of emergency and pediatric doctors quickly realized the severity of the situation. “He had complete paralysis on the left side of his body. No movement was possible, and the vision in his left visual field was lost. He could not move his eyes to the left, either,” Dr. Lahoti explains. “He had the tell-tale signs of a stroke affecting the right side of his brain.”

The CT scan confirmed that a blood clot was blocking critical blood flow to the right side of Preston’s brain. Dr. Lahoti determined there was no time to lose.

“We had to take that clot out. If we hadn’t, then chances are he would have gone on to develop a very big stroke. This would have not only left him paralyzed potentially for the rest of his life, but it could have been life threatening and taken his life,” Dr. Lahoti says.

A rare procedure, a miraculous recovery

While thrombectomies are more common in adult stroke patients, they remain exceedingly rare in children. Preston was one of the first children in the world to have the procedure done.

“By the time we went on to do this procedure of clot removal, which is called thrombectomy, that clot had further traveled down to a smaller blood vessel,” says Dr. Lahoti. “The further out the clot is, the higher the risk it is to get it out. Because we’re getting into very tiny blood vessels in the brain. We decided to take that risk and prevent a lifelong disability.”

‘It was truly magical’

“Soon after we removed the clot, we saw a complete reversal of his deficits. It was truly magical to see that,” Dr. Lahoti recalls. “To have him come in with complete paralysis, and then we did this procedure under anesthesia. After the anesthesia was taken off, he woke up and was able to move his left arm and leg again.”

Prior to this type of intervention, patients — especially children — had few choices.

“Before this therapy was available, patients didn’t have options. The usual course was they were left with paralysis for life, and they were never able to live normally again,” says Dr. Lahoti.

A complicated lead-up

The signs of Preston’s illness began about a month before the stroke. He had a bladder infection that turned into a kidney infection, requiring hospitalization just days before Christmas Eve. He was discharged on Saturday — only to return under emergency conditions.

At the time of the stroke, his heart function had dropped to just 10%, his dad says. His doctors believe a rare complication led to his condition.

“In his case, he had gotten the flu. Because of the flu, there was a cross-reaction of the immunity his body built up for the flu,” Dr. Lahoti explains. “His immune system attacked the flu virus, but also his kidneys and heart, too. Because of that, his heart pumping got really weak, and we think that led to the formation of a clot in his heart. The clot then traveled from the heart to his brain.”

Preston’s father adds that his late wife — the children’s mother — tragically passed away from a pulmonary embolism, making the emergency even more challenging emotionally.

Recovery and Hope

Preston spent a couple of weeks in the hospital, but today, he is thriving and he’s back in school. He’s practicing running and riding his bike and is even thinking about his future.

“He goes to OT (occupational therapy) once a week, PT (physical therapy) once a month now. He’s getting along pretty good,” Shawn says.

“My leg is better,” Preston adds.

“Yes, your leg is getting better. Your hand is going to get better, too,” Shawn reassures him.

Preston has received Botox in his left arm to help regain movement, and while he didn’t play baseball this year, his progress continues.

“Riding a bike, it’s hard to hold onto the handlebars and stuff like that. We just got to keep working hard,” Shawn says.

Perhaps most touching of all is the career goal this experience has inspired in Preston.

He now says he wants to become a nurse — because the nurses cared for him so well.

To learn more about stroke care at OSF HealthCare Illinois Neurological Institute, visit the [OSF HealthCare website](#).