

Script – Broadcast – Life after stroke

INTRO

On a cold winter night in December 2019, Deanne Meseck of Rockford, Illinois, couldn't wait to dig into her store-bought meal of roasted chicken, gravy and mashed potatoes. She had just completed a colonoscopy earlier that day and was famished. But as she and her husband, Ryan, started eating, her life at age 47 changed forever.

Ryan noticed food was dropping from the left side of her mouth. Concerned, he told his wife to put her arms up, but Meseck couldn't lift her left arm. And when he asked her to speak, her words were jumbled, so he immediately called 9-1-1. A crew arrived and suspected Meseck was having a stroke.

Meseck was taken by ambulance to OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center in Rockford, where she underwent a battery of tests and procedures. The diagnosis came back as an ischemic stroke from a blood clot. Ischemic strokes, caused by a blocked vessel, account for about 87% of all strokes, and roughly 60% of strokes among people under 50.

Meseck required surgery to relieve the swelling in her brain. She suffered respiratory depression from pneumonia, which required being on a vent for an extended period. After spending weeks in the hospital, Meseck was moved to a rehabilitation facility, followed by extensive physical, speech, occupational and ophthalmological treatment, some of which is ongoing. Despite tremendous progress, Meseck will always have some limitations, according to Michele Johnson, a nurse practitioner at OSF HealthCare, and Meseck's primary care provider.

((SOT))

Michele Johnson, nurse practitioner, OSF HealthCare

"With the contractures (stiffness) of the hands, going back to therapy is important, some speech impediment, some visual problems and the weakness, she has progressed significantly since this all occurred. But there will always be some permanent disability." (:20)

Perhaps the hardest part for Meseck was giving up her 26-year career in finance. While the physical toll was hard on Meseck, the mental hurdles proved equally challenging. She sought mental health therapy, which gave her a new perspective while coping with severe depression.

Meseck filled her days by walking her dog, streaming TV shows and enjoying time with her two-year-old grandchild. But Meseck, now 53, was searching for an opportunity where she could make a difference, especially for people going through similar challenges.

She started attending a local, monthly group for stroke survivors. In 2024, the organizers of the group planned a benefit walk, and Meseck was on board, recruiting friends and family to form a team. But when she found out there wouldn't be a second walk the next year due to a lack of volunteers, Meseck knew what she needed to do. She and her sister, Shelly, rolled up their sleeves and started planning the second annual walk, which takes place on May 30 in Rockford. Meseck says coordinating this major special event is her new calling.

((SOT))

Deanne Meseck, stroke survivor

"I want to motivate people to know that there is life after stroke," she says. "It may be hard to find it, and you won't be the same as you were, but you can do it. If I can do it, anybody can do it." (:14)