

Transcript of Media-Brain aneurysm survivor says signs and symptoms 'need to be added to the conversation'

September is Brain Aneurysm Awareness Month

Kari Rixstine (pronounced RICK-steen), OSF patient from Bloomington, Illinois who survived a brain aneurysm

Rixstine's physical recovery was relatively strong, but the experience left lasting emotional and cognitive effects.

"It was like I was terrified to even leave the house. When I was alone out there and it ruptured I worked so hard to get home and then once I was released from the hospital, after begging to go home, I didn't know what to do. I didn't know how to live." (:19)

Despite being afraid to resume her life, Rixstine pushed on to set an example for her children.

Rixstine began resuming life as normally as possible to show her children she wasn't giving up.

"And I wanted to be an example for them of overcoming. Going through it and overcoming and recovering from it. So knowing they were watching me, gave me the strength to get through the bad days," she says choking back tears. (:19)

One in 50 people suffer a ruptured brain aneurysm, but surprisingly to Rixstine, her condition isn't as widely talked about or understood.

"And it has been incredible for me knowing people who have been through most that [which is] ischemic stroke not hemorrhagic stroke like what I had. I don't understand how ischemic stroke is so well known and they push it, and push it, and push it, but the hemorrhagic stroke with a brain bleed, nobody has information on that." (:28)

Rixstine wants people to recognize that a hemorrhagic stroke caused by a ruptured aneurysm can look different from the more familiar warning signs associated with an ischemic stroke..

"They call it a 'thunderclap' headache. [It's} the worst headache of your life. That's what you need to look for. There are vision issues and nausea. When mine ruptured – pain in my neck. I was totally confused, instantly. "(:22)

Dr. Thomas Russell, neurosurgeon, OSF HealthCare

Dr. Russell says it's important to know the signs of a bulging aneurysm.

"Sometimes it can be something as simple as a droopy eyelid, your pupil gets really dilated because sometimes these aneurysms can enlarge and press on the cranial nerve. When they press on those nerves they can cause some symptoms but it's kind of silent because they didn't actually rupture." (:17)

During this Brain Aneurysm Awareness Month, Dr. Russell also wants people to know stress doesn't cause an aneurysm.

"People think that 'oh if you got really stressed or really angry that it can cause an aneurysm ... or lifting heavy weights.' That doesn't cause an aneurysm but if you have one, that can cause a predilection for rupture and that's usually the concern," he shares. (:18)

He also wants people to know a brain aneurysm isn't a death sentence.

"We actually have a bunch of different ways to treat aneurysm so if you have a strong family history and there's some concern about aneurysms and brain bleeds in the family, then talk to your doctor about it because there are screening tests we can do and there are treatments we can also perform." (:17)