

Miracle Workers: Piedmont's

By Jeff Silver

September 18, 2010, was a warm, sunny late summer day. By evening, the weather had cooled just a bit and was perfect for a picnic. Alpharetta residents Mark and Sherri Selman were doing just that—joining the family birthday celebration of a young girl Sherri had been mentoring. Just after 6:30 p.m., however, Sherri noticed that Mark had stopped talking, was sweating profusely and was slumping to one side.

Having had 30 years of first-aid training as a Delta flight attendant, Sherri recognized immediately that her husband was having a stroke. “It happened with absolutely no warning. We were eating soup one minute, and the next, his right side was limp, and his eyes were fixed,” she says.

An ambulance took Selman to the Saint Joseph's Hospital emergency department within 30 minutes. This was critical since time is of the essence in stroke treatment. He was administered tissue plasminogen activator, better known as tPA, a blood-clot-busting drug. However, his symptoms were so significant that the neurologist, Matthew Gwynn, M.D., recommended a transfer to Piedmont Hospital, which is certified by The Joint Commission as a primary stroke center. That way, Selman could receive care from Piedmont's specialized interventional radiology (IR) team. They would be able to perform a procedure known as a

thrombectomy, which appeared to be needed to remove Selman's blood clot.

All the necessary specialists were in place when Selman arrived at Piedmont at 9:30 p.m. – including nurses, CT technologists, Emergency Department physicians, and respiratory and anesthesiology departments. Chris Russell, M.D., was the on-call neurologist, and Lou Jacobs, M.D., was the interventional neuroradiologist who would perform the thrombectomy.

“By the time we saw him, there had been some improvement in his symptoms, but there was still an occluded artery that was blocked by the clot. Plus, his initial symptoms began to recur,” says Dr. Jacobs, who performed the thrombectomy that night.

Selman was on a ventilator until late the following evening. Sherri was prepared for the chance that her husband wouldn't be able to speak because of the severity of his stroke. His initial score on the National Institutes of Health Stroke Scale (NIHSS) had been 22, indicating severe disability.

However, as soon as the ventilator was removed, he recognized his wife, spoke and raised his arms and legs. The next day, he was even able to walk up and down the hall. “The doctors and nurses were all there applauding,” Sherri remembers. “Even they were amazed at how fast and how well he'd survived such a severe stroke.”

*This simple test will help you detect stroke symptoms and act **FAST**:*

F = FACE Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop?

A = ARM Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?

S = SPEECH Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence. Does the speech sound slurred or strange?

T = TIME If you observe any of these signs, it's time to call 911 or get to the nearest stroke center or hospital.

Stroke Team

In fact, Selman's NIHSS score was now in the zero to one range, which is as close to normal as possible. Even his sense of humor survived in tact. "I wish people had thought of me as 'miraculous' before this," he jokes.

Even though he spent 10 days in the hospital (including his 60th birthday), Selman was back to work as a financial advisor less than a month later.

Amy Perez, manager and educator with Piedmont's stroke program, points out that in addition to Selman's spectacular response to treatment, the collaboration between Piedmont and Saint Joseph's also was critical. She says, "This was a perfect storm of good communication and logistics. Everything from Atlanta traffic to the timing of the medical team came together perfectly."

Dr. Jacobs agrees, adding, "The entire stroke team has put a tremendous amount of effort into constantly refining the treatment process and making it run as smoothly as possible. I can't say enough good things about how every single person on the team stepped up to contribute to achieving such a phenomenal outcome."

Mark Selman is well aware of the magnitude of the events that September evening. "I'm absolutely blown away when I think of all the people who were involved in saving my life. I feel like God performed a miracle through me." ✚

Know the Warning Signs

A stroke is commonly called a "brain attack," cutting off vital blood flow and oxygen to the brain. Approximately 800,000 strokes occur annually in the United States. Call 911 immediately if you have any of the following warning signs:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg – especially on one side of the body.
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding.
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes.
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination.
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause.

