

Joli Brandt

47 Years Old

Do any of us pay attention to health care information on the radio? How effective are medical “awareness” messages? It is difficult to know if the messages reach the right people at the right time. Joli Brandt, forty-seven years old, and her friend, Monte Davis, did not know that they were “targeted” for a special health care message from Saint Luke’s Stroke Team on Sunday, July 15. They were just going fishing.



Joli: It was a great morning. The sun was shining and it was lovely. On our way to the lake we heard a message about Saint Luke’s Stroke Center on the radio. They told a story about a man who had had a stroke and was fortunate enough to get to Saint Luke’s Stroke Center in time to have the stroke reversed. They emphasized how life-threatening the stroke was and how important it was to get there immediately. Within twenty-four hours after the treatment, the patient seemed to have his movement back and was doing wonderfully well. The Saint Luke’s Stroke Team had saved his life.

The story got us talking. We thought it was pretty exceptional. It gave us goose bumps. We decided that if something like that were to happen to us, we would want to end up at Saint Luke’s Stroke Center.

However, it was a beautiful day and they were going fishing so their thoughts turned to other matters. After six hours on

the lake, they decided to end a great day. Joli remembers the next series of events.

Joli: We were done for the day. Monte started to put up the fishing poles. I looked around and noticed that it seemed to be getting a little hazy but I didn't think anything about it. Then I looked down and I saw this arm lying on my leg. I thought it was Monte's arm but I looked over at him and he was on the other side of the boat still putting up the fishing equipment. I still didn't think anything about it. But suddenly it dawned on me that if he was over there, whose arm could this be? I looked down at the arm and followed it all the way up to my shoulder. OH MY! It was mine! That was not good, I figured.

I tried to call out to Monte. I thought I was saying his name, but evidently my speech was slurred so he didn't hear me. When I finally got his attention, I noticed the look on his face: He knew instantly that something was seriously wrong with me!

I knew something was not right. I was thinking clearly but things were not happening the way I thought they should. He put his hand in the water, splashed water in my face, started up the boat engine and said, "We have to go right now!" I tried to wrap my right arm around the right chair but I could not get it around. So I wrapped my left arm around the chair, and we were off in a hurry. Stroke never entered my mind. I could still move my right arm somewhat but I had no idea that my face was drawn up.

As soon as they arrived at the dock, Monte yelled out for somebody to call 911. Some people at the dock helped trans-

fer Joli onto the dock to wait for the emergency first responders. The wait was short but the interaction was not good.

Joli: They questioned me but most of the questions were the same, "Have you been drinking? You guys have been out on the water on a hot day." We told them that we had been fishing and that the only thing we had to drink was water and that we had eaten a few turkey sandwiches. They did not believe us.

Monte: They acted as if it had something to do with alcohol or dehydration. "No, she is having a stroke and she needs help," I kept saying. Some of the people on the dock helped her off the boat and someone came over and asked her a few questions. They did not think it was a big deal, and I was getting really aggravated.

Even though Monte and Joli had heard the radio message about stroke reversal earlier that day, how was it that Monte was so certain this was a stroke?

Monte: I decided it was a stroke because my mom had told me the signs and symptoms of what happens to a stroke victim. My mom's parents had several strokes. I knew how their hands would roll up and their faces would draw up on one side. As soon as I saw Joli's face drawn up on one side and heard her slurred speech, I knew she was having a stroke.

Joli: The paramedics came and checked me out and asked several questions. Between the time I got out of the boat and the time they got there, I was getting worse. My words were fuzzier, and Monte said that my face was drawn up even more than before.

Monte: The paramedics wanted to know what hospital I wanted Joli to go to. They gave the choice of many hospitals, and I said: "How about Saint Luke's?" We had heard the message about Saint Luke's Stroke Center that morning on our way to the lake and had made the decision that if anything like that ever happened to us, it was to be Saint Luke's Stroke Center.

In the ambulance the paramedics kept asking Joli for her date of birth, the name of the President of the United States and the day of the week.

Joli: I knew my date of birth, but evidently it was not coming out that way. I was saying 2/9/57, but that was not the way it was coming out. It was coming out silly. By then it was a little harder to swallow and my right arm and leg were moving less.

Upon their arrival at Saint Luke's Hospital Joli was immediately surrounded by the stroke team physicians and nurses. The stroke team neurologist confirmed Monte's diagnosis of stroke. By a coincidence, Monte recognized the doctor's name from the radio message. He explained the options for reversal of the stroke.

Joli: They asked me for my mom and dad's phone numbers, which I recognized in my head but when I tried to say them, they came out all funny. The whole thing was very strange. And then they said it was time to go, so off I went.

Monte was not legally related to Joli, so he couldn't give permission for the procedure. Her parents had to be located

before the stroke team could proceed. Once permission had been obtained, Joli was taken to the angiogram suite to find the clot and determine the best way to remove it.

Joli: I am awake during the procedure. They strapped me down. I could not feel anything, even in my leg where I know they went into the artery. There was a monitor, and I watched what they were doing. I could hear the scope go up past my ear. They encountered a tight space as they were trying to get it up into my brain, and my head felt like it exploded. It really hurt! They had to pull back and go in on the other side. It was the only way to get to the clot. They kept asking me questions. I think they were hoping my answers would not be so slurred because that would mean the clot was being broken up. I watched one of the technicians; she kept shaking her head from time to time, saying: "No, we are not there yet." I eventually lost track of time.

Joli was unaware of the treatment options chosen for her by her family with guidance from the stroke team physicians and nurses. It was not possible to dissolve the entire clot with just the arterial infusion of tPA, so the family was offered the option of utilizing the Merci® Retriever.

Monte: At first it sounded as if they were going to use her as a guinea pig but after they explained it to us, we did not think there was any choice. With the strokes I have heard about, or have been around, you don't have a choice. The outcome is generally not good. We chose the experimental "corkscrew" treatment, and it was as if she went through "overnight rehabilitation."

Joli: They sent someone down from rehab, but there was no point. I mean, they checked me out and it was wonderful. I was ready to go home the next day.

Monte: She was up walking the halls the next day – and now she is almost 100% normal. She is very functional. We are very grateful; you know, another stroke patient might not be.

Joli had some medical risk factors for stroke. She had smoked a pack of cigarettes for thirty years and also had atrial fibrillation.

Joli: I did have some fluttering in my chest, usually at night. Sometimes when I would be lying down, I could feel it: just da-da-da-da-da – and then nothing. No pain. It might last for twenty minutes or so. I had many episodes over the past five years but I never checked it out. I thought it was indigestion. In fact, in one particular month I had six episodes, and then they just quit. I should have checked it out because that was the problem. Those were irregular heart beats, called atrial fibrillation.

Monte shared his thoughts on Joli's stroke reversal.

Monte: Get there as soon as possible! You have a three-hour window and time is very, very critical. Don't put it off. Load them up and get them there because they've only got that three-hour window. If we had not heard the message for Saint Luke' Stroke Center, we would have gone to the closest hospital. You need a stroke center where they can do the clot busting.



COMMENTS

A healthy forty-seven-year-old is unlikely to know where to go for stroke reversal. Even though Joli had a history of smoking and “indigestion,” she was healthy. She did not think that she was at risk for stroke. If she and Monte had not heard the Saint Luke’s stroke team reversal story on the radio, it is unlikely they would have ended up at Saint Luke’s Stroke Center. Monte recognized Joli’s stroke symptoms and understood that a reversal attempt was possible. His family history had taught him to recognize a stroke. His mother had even taught him the signs and symptoms of stroke.

They made the most of their information and were not discouraged by the people at the dock who ignored Joli’s paralysis and slurred speech. Monte and Joli are advocates for public education about stroke symptoms and the need for speedy treatment in a stroke center that is equipped to receive and treat stroke victims any time of the day or night.



