Uncommon brain procedure saves teen suffering a stroke

Hospital designated to treat even the most complex stroke cases

The teenage stroke patient’s first word off the ventilator was “Mom.”

Relief flooded Lisa Wilcox. Her child recognized her and spoke! Finally, a glimmer of hope in the nightmare days since her daughter suffered a stroke.

“Stroke isn’t something that happens to 16-year-old girls,” Wilcox said. “I just couldn’t process it.”

In early November, only a day after Blake Ephraim led cheers at a football game, a pounding, debilitating headache and vomiting sent her to an emergency room. Finding bleeding on her brain, physicians transferred her to The University of Kansas Hospital’s Center for Advanced Brain and Neurological Care.

Region’s stroke care experts
The hospital is among the country’s first five healthcare facilities named an Advanced Comprehensive Stroke Center – stroke care’s highest certification. This means the hospital is staffed, equipped and trained to treat patients with the most challenging stroke cases.

Led by neurosurgeon Koji Ebersole, MD, and neurointensivist Kathrin Husmann, MD, the Acute Stroke Response Team determined cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (CVST) caused Blake’s stroke. A rare condition most often seen in young adults, CVST requires a high degree of expertise to diagnose and treat.

Lifesaving neurosurgical procedure
When initial measures did not relieve pressure on Blake’s brain, Ebersole performed a decompressive craniotomy. In this lifesaving neurosurgical procedure, rarely required for young patients, he removed part of Blake’s skull so her swollen brain could expand. Brain pressure stabilized, allowing the team to break up the blood clot that had led to the stroke.

The stroke team monitored Blake continuously for two weeks in neurointensive care. She spent the next month tackling intensive physical, occupational and speech therapies in a Nebraska rehabilitation facility.

Quitting? Not an option
“I’d never been sick, never had to ask for help,” Blake said. “And here I couldn’t even figure out the words I wanted. But quitting was never an option.”

Back at Olathe South High School, Blake concentrates to complete junior year coursework. Her remarkable progress in an ongoing recovery inspires her physicians and classmates alike.

“The lesson I learned,” her mother concluded, “is if your child is having a stroke, get them to The University of Kansas Hospital. You want the neurosciences team helping your child from the first second they can.”

At 16, Blake Ephraim survived a stroke, thanks to an uncommon neurosurgical procedure and specialized care at The University of Kansas Hospital. She sports colorful wristbands classmates made to support her ongoing recovery.

“We can be at the bedside within moments to assess and respond immediately to the situation. That makes a huge difference to stroke patients, as time isn’t on our side.”

– Kathrin Husmann, MD, neurointensivist

American Heart Association
American Stroke Association
CERTIFICATION
Meets standards for Comprehensive Stroke Center

Best Hospitals
U.S. News
NATIONAL NEUROLOGY & NEUROSURGERY 2013-14

The University of Kansas Hospital
Surviving a stroke and its debilitating effects is a race against time. Time lost is brain lost. About 2 million brain cells die every minute a stroke goes without effective treatment. Receiving expert stroke care fast can mean the difference between life and death – between the life the individual has known and a life with serious disabilities.

**Highest level of stroke care**
The University of Kansas Hospital is the region’s only Advanced Comprehensive Stroke Center, which is the highest certification for stroke care. For patients, this means access to some of the nation’s top neurologists and neurosurgeons, and to the very latest treatment options.

“The higher standards of the CSC designation indicates our hospital can assist all stroke patients and is better prepared – with state-of-the-art equipment, dedicated facilities, staff and training – to diagnose and treat patients with the most complex strokes,” said Colleen Lechtenberg, MD, medical director of the stroke program.

**Stroke: a brain attack**
A stroke occurs when blood supply to the brain is suddenly cut off because of a blocked or ruptured blood vessel. Without blood and oxygen, part of the brain begins to die. Strokes can occur at any age but most often affect those 65 and older.

**The University of Kansas Hospital’s stroke program, by the numbers**

6 For 6 consecutive years, the stroke program has met the stringent standards for quality and performance required to earn the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association Get With The Guidelines Gold Plus Award.

98th Patient satisfaction for stroke care ranks in the 98th percentile nationally among all hospitals in the Press Ganey survey.

800 The stroke center treated about 800 patients in 2013, making it one of the region’s largest-volume stroke care facilities.

3-5 On average, the Acute Response Stroke Team is assembled and at the bedside within 3-5 minutes of a stroke patient’s arrival in the Emergency Department.

20th U.S. News & World Report ranked the hospital’s neurology and neurosurgery programs 20th in the nation for its 2013-2014 Best Hospitals study of more than 5,000 healthcare facilities.

Learn more about the Advanced Comprehensive Stroke Center: kumed.com/stroke.

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**Learn stroke symptoms – you may save a life**

Stroke is the No. 1 cause of serious, long-term disability in U.S. adults and is among the leading causes of death.

May is American Stroke Month. It’s the perfect time to learn how to recognize stroke symptoms. The faster someone suffering a stroke receives expert medical attention, the greater the chances of survival and of limiting disabilities.

Stroke symptoms are sudden and may include:

- Numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, often on one side
- Confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Severe headache with no known cause

**Act F-A-S-T**
If you think someone may be having a stroke, use this simple Act FAST test.

**Face**
Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop?

**Arms**
Have the person raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?

**Speech**
Can the person repeat a simple sentence? Is speech slurred?

**Time**
Call 911 immediately if you suspect a stroke. Note the time symptoms began.