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STROKE SURVIVOR VOWS TO 'NEVER GIVE UP'

LATROBE, PA, May 11, 2010 ... For Bob Kasperik, a physically active, healthy, 61-year-old Derry area resident, March 30, 2008, dawned as a normal weekend day. An early morning power walk would be followed by an afternoon watching Penguins hockey with family. Little did Kasperik, a pharmacist by profession, know that life as he was accustomed to was about to change forever.

After enjoying a lovely afternoon visiting and watching the game with his daughter and wife, Kasperik decided to head upstairs. Always conscious of keeping fit, Kasperik sprinted up the stairs. As he approached the top landing, he hit his right toe and fell down. "I began to experience numbness in my right leg and a strange feeling like when you hit your funny bone," he explained. "As I tried to walk into the bathroom, I noticed I couldn't raise or control my right hand. Within a matter of five seconds I knew something terrible was happening – like a stroke."

Kasperik's pharmacy background and medical knowledge prompted him to perform a stroke test and motivated him into taking quick action, which helped to lessen the severity of his stroke. "The whole experience was quite bizarre, it was like a great magnet pulled me to the floor and was taking over my body," explained Kasperik. "Fortunately, my face and speech were unaffected and due to quick paramedic action I was well within the parameters to receive tPA medicine to stop a stroke in progress."

Kasperik spent six days in Latrobe Hospital following his stroke, before being transferred to Westmoreland's Barclay Rehabilitation Center to receive further rehab therapy. The inpatient rehab center is now part of the Neuroscience at Latrobe Hospital, relocated in March 2009.

"The staff at both facilities was wonderful and spent a lot of time helping me regain use of my right side." Having lived locally and worked for 10 years in the

pharmacy at Westmoreland Hospital, I knew a lot of people and they were great to me, “ he said. “I knew my nurses and other employees, and had visitors everyday which helped to boost my spirits. It was a challenging and hard period of time, but Excela was there for me every second of the day.”

However, Kasperik noted, “Even being in the medical field and having some knowledge of the symptoms of a stroke, I still was very naive and never realized every stroke is different. You are not always better in six weeks because it is an ongoing rehabilitation process.”

At first Kasperik could feel nothing from the neck down and could only make a fist with his right hand. “But I was always a dedicated person, feared nothing and was always willing to try something different and work hard to accomplish my goals,” he stated. “I knew this was going to be one of the hardest things that I ever had to do and I was not willing to give up without a fight!”

The thing that is so hard for Kasperik to grasp is that he was very active, his blood profile was good, cholesterol and sugar were normal. He did have high blood pressure and that along with probable job tension most likely contributed to an incidence of arterial fibrillation that ultimately triggered the stroke.

Two years later and officially retired, Kasperik still struggles with his right leg but wears a brace and is able to walk. “I have come a long way and still have a ways to go,” he stated. “But through determination and hard work, I have come this far, something that my doctors were not expecting.”

He added that he has never been a person who lets depression affect him. “I know I still have to keep working at this,” he said. “I faithfully go to rehab four days on my own and swim daily in the pool.”

Kasperik also attributes his success to the support of his family and loving wife who he could have never done it without her by his side. “For them, I refused to give up and have tried to do the best I can with what I have to work with.”

He admits he has made changes in his lifestyle that weren't easy, but he says he's adjusted. One of the first things he would think about after his stroke was that he wouldn't be able to go to Penn State football games with his son anymore. “That changed when my son, a season ticket holder, arranged for our seats to be switched to the handicap section. Now, I can come and go with ease as I please without disrupting others.”

According to Kasperik, the thing that bothers him the most about his resulting limitation is a loss of independence because he must rely on family for things he previously did for himself, such as driving. "I am so grateful and thankful to them for what they have done for me," he stated.

"Recovery truly has a lot to do with attitude," emphasizes Kasperik. I have faith and believe in miracles and one of these days soon my brain will finally relate to the rehabilitation of my knee. I wouldn't be where I am today if I didn't believe that."