

Dan Malaszczyk

Hello Friends

My name is Dan Malaszczyk

I'm 69 years old and live in Wantagh NY

And I had an ischemic stroke in 2010.

On September 17th of that year, the day started off rather ordinary but little would I know that day would change my entire life and make me understand how precious and fragile life really is. The event, as I like to call it, seemed to come out of nowhere. One minute, Maryann and I were planning a day of crabbing at Captree State Park and the next minute I was disoriented almost in a trance. I experienced all the classic sign of a stroke

- Severe dizziness and the inability to stand
- Numbness and loss of feeling on the right side of my body
- Unable to speak. Ironically I was able to visualize what I wanted to say by just could not form the words.

For the first time in my life, I thought that I was going to die, right there in my own living room.

Thankfully, Maryann recognized the signs of a stroke and got us help immediately. Within minutes the paramedics were whisking me off to the hospital and a CT scan confirmed the event. The next 4 days were spent in the stroke unit at North shore LIJ where the outstanding medical staff performed every diagnostic test available. The diagnosis was reconfirmed and it was determined that there were no additional clots or obstructions in my body. Now on the 4th day, armed with a generous supply of Plavix and double strength cholesterol medication, I was released from the hospital. Fortunately, in my case I had restored mobility and normal speaking was regained.

I appeared to be normal after this horrific and life changing event. But I wasn't. The emotional scars left by this life changing event were very deep, yet not completely visible to the traditional medical community. Doctors are really good at diagnosing and treating physical problems, but that's where it seems to end. The medical community does not have an emotional segway that helps the stroke survivor understand that emotionally it is going to be all right. None of the doctors that treated me have ever had a stroke, so they could only tell you what they have read not what they have lived through. Cook book recipes do not work the same for everyone. One of the primary benefits of the Stroke Life Society is that you are in a safe haven of people who are stroke survivors and have experienced the pains and uncertainties that you face.

What I've learned from our many stroke survivors and co survivors at the Stroke Life Society is that a stroke has two distinct faces.

The first face is the physical face which is quite evident and everyone recognizes as “the event” which is characterized by classic physical signs such as dizziness, loss of balance, paralysis of the extremities, aphasia and other classic signals. These symptoms are instantly recognized by the initial ER responders and are the telltale signs of the brain’s malfunction.

As I said, the medical community does an outstanding job in diagnosing, responding to and treating these symptoms and channeling the stroke victim into the proper path for further diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation and return to the main stream environment.

The second face of a stroke which is less evident to the medical community but exists in the sub-consciousness of every stroke survivor is the emotional aspects of a stroke. The emotional aspects are generally minimized by the medical community in their zeal to treat the physical aspects. However they require the same amount of careful attention that is given to the physical face of stroke.

Because a stroke in some cases can be considered a near death experience, the survivor begins to question his/her mortality in facing the possibility of death for the first time.

It generally does not surface until the stroke survivor has completely digested what has initially occurred in the physical event itself and is back home or in a convalescent environment. They can then begin to analyze what has happened to them and begin to question the possibilities of it happening again.

I’ve had survivors tell me that pre stroke they felt like they were 45 years old for the last 20 years, that is they were too busy living life to be concerned about life itself, however, after being victimized by a stroke and falling into a quazi- paralysis of emotional uncertainty they begin to question their mortality and life, possibility for the first time..

The support given by my fellow stroke survivors and co survivors at the Stroke Life Society truly helped me and is a keystone in the emotional healing process. Understanding that stroke survivors need emotional support to deal with this life changing event is an important step in the healing process and the next step is your decision to reach out and get it.

We are not alone and it is our responsibility to do what is necessary to heal.