

Regaining Language After Stroke with Neurorehabilitation

When a person has a stroke, their life often changes dramatically in just an instant. This was the case for Patrick Prock. After experiencing a stroke in October of 2019, Patrick was diagnosed with profound global aphasia—he had lost the ability to communicate using words. Aphasia is an acquired impairment in language caused by stroke or other injury to the areas of the brain responsible for language production and/or processing. Global aphasia is the most severe form of aphasia, affecting speaking, comprehension, reading, and writing as a result of damage to multiple language-related brain regions. About one third of individuals who have a stroke have some form of aphasia, and the impacts of the sudden loss of communication can be devastating.



Patrick spent two weeks in the intensive care unit immediately after his stroke, and when he was released from the hospital, he was incredibly frustrated. Patrick wasn't able to talk to his children, his parents, or his friends. Even though he had so much he wanted to say, he just couldn't get the words out. Fortunately, Patrick found The Stroke Center - Dallas on the Dallas campus of Texas Woman's University. There, Patrick had an opportunity to engage in intensive neurorehabilitation targeted at his language impairments.

At first, his aphasia was severe, and he could only say a few words. However, after two and a half years of working with clinicians and scientists at The Stroke Center - Dallas, Patrick is able to communicate much better, and his aphasia is now classified as mild. His rehabilitation treatment program was tailored to his specific speech, language, and cognitive deficits, and it included intensive, individual sessions with speech-language pathology graduate students overseen by licensed speech-language pathologists. Patrick worked his way up from speaking individual words to short sentences, and now he is able to share longer narratives. Neurorehabilitation has allowed Patrick to share his thoughts and stories again.

"Our program is set up as an intense, impairment-level treatment program," remarked Dr. Jyutika Mehta, Director of The Stroke Center - Dallas. "Patients are here three days a week and receive three to four hours of individual daily therapy, group sessions, and labs," she continued. In addition to her role as the Center's Director, Jyutika is Professor of Communication Sciences at Texas Woman's University, and she is also a Member of the American Society for Neurorehabilitation (ASNR), part of our Member Engagement Committee, and she serves on the ASNR Board of Directors.

The Stroke Center - Dallas is a center of excellence for both research and neurorehabilitation focused on stroke and traumatic brain injury. Research and clinical trials conducted there are contributing to advancing evidence-based clinical practice while also training students in cutting-edge neurorehabilitation approaches. In addition, with support from grants and donor contributions, patients like Patrick receive outstanding short-term and long-term outpatient rehabilitation services at no cost. The Center's approach emphasizes extensive practice to promote recovery after stroke or other brain injury.

Not only did Patrick receive excellent, evidence-based treatment, but he also had opportunities to connect with other stroke survivors and their families, and this sense of community has been tremendously valuable. After his first year of treatment, Patrick transitioned to group treatment sessions where he has made new friends and been a great source of inspiration and support for other patients. "I know I have aphasia," Patrick explained. "There is no cure, but I have goals. Because I want to speak."

Through The Stroke Center - Dallas, Dr. Mehta and their team of talented clinicians, scientists, and staff embody ASNR's mission to improve the lives of people with neurological disorders through advances in basic and clinical research. Their work is having real-world impacts every day for people with stroke and traumatic brain injury.