

# STROKE MATTERS

SPRING/  
SUMMER 2021

Minnesota  
Stroke  
Association



LIVE EVERY MOMENT PG. 4



NO TWO STROKES PG. 8

# Letter from the Chief Executive Officer

By David King



Dear Stroke Matters Readers,

Each day we approach what seems to be the end of this worldwide pandemic. But, it's important to remember that throughout this entire event, stroke has never stopped being an issue. There's no vaccine for stroke and no amount of social distancing will slow it down. Stroke happens and so it's important to know the warning signs and what to do when it hits.

In this issue, we have two profiles that tell two very different stories of stroke and stroke survival. Michael Lord had undiagnosed high blood pressure and avoided going to the doctor. When his stroke occurred, he ignored the signs and tried to push through his day. Lewis Mitchel was the picture of health. His aneurysm simply waited until it was ready and only the fast actions of his children saved his life.

Two different scenarios with the same outcome: stroke survivors who want to share their stories. Michael hopes to spread the word to men who avoid seeking medical attention to get checked out to maybe avoid what he went through. Lewis wants people to know that even the unexpected can be worked through and that stroke isn't the end of the road. These two men are worth listening to and learning from. I hope you enjoy their stories.

Also, we have Strides for Stroke coming up! With the world still being the way it is, the only safe way to walk together is to walk apart. So, once again we'll be holding a Virtual Strides for Stroke on May 15. Registration is now live at [strokemn.org](http://strokemn.org), so sign up, take your walk and let us see your pictures and videos. It's not ideal, I know. But, we know how important it is to keep our community safe and healthy so that next year we can all come together and look each other in the eyes. It's what we all want, so let's work together to get there.

Thank you so much for your continued support of the Minnesota Stroke Association. Happy reading.

David King

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*Address editorial comments or letters to:*

*Public Awareness Manager  
Minnesota Stroke Association  
2277 Highway 36 West, Suite 200  
Roseville, MN 55113-3830  
763-553-0088*

*Advertising information contact:*

*Jarett Klein  
Minnesota Stroke Association  
2277 Highway 36 West, Suite 200  
Roseville, MN 55113-3830  
763-553-0088*

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# Stroke and the Covid Pandemic

By Nancy Christensen, Administrative Assistant

Stroke is a life threatening emergency and does NOT take a break even with a worldwide pandemic going on. A stroke is a sudden interruption of blood flow to the brain; it deprives the brain of oxygen and nutrients needed to survive. Fast treatment is necessary in order to prevent death or long term disability.

During the COVID -19 pandemic, there has been an increase in stroke but fewer patients are seeking immediate treatment, likely in fear of contracting the virus. Those who may have suffered a stroke before the pandemic may be suffering from heightened anxiety and those who might be experiencing stroke symptoms are not seeking immediate care.

Dr. Babak Navi, Associate Professor of Neurology and Neuroscience at Weill Cornell Medicine and Medical Director of the Weill Cornell Stroke Center, explained the complex connection between stroke and COVID-19 and emphasized that patients seek care immediately if they believe they have suffered a stroke.

## **DO NOT IGNORE STROKE SYMPTOMS BECAUSE OF FEAR!**

- If you or someone you know is experiencing stroke symptoms, call 911 and get to a hospital as soon as possible. First responders and dispatchers have been trained to safely and quickly transport patients to the hospital even during the Covid crisis.
- A stroke is a medical emergency and the most effective treatment happens within a few hours after the stroke occurs.
- It is understandable to be afraid to go to the hospital but rest assured that hospitals and health care providers are doing everything possible to protect patients from the virus and at the same time provide crucial medical care when needed. Most hospitals have been separating COVID patients from patients that do not have the virus and extreme measures have been taken to reduce the transmission.
- Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is SAFE for EVERYONE to call 911. It is SAFE for ANYONE to go to the hospital.

The Minnesota Stroke Association reminds and recommends that all of us once again familiarize ourselves with the ACT FAST method of assessing symptoms for yourself and others who might be experiencing a stroke.

**F- Facial Weakness**

**A-Arm Weakness**

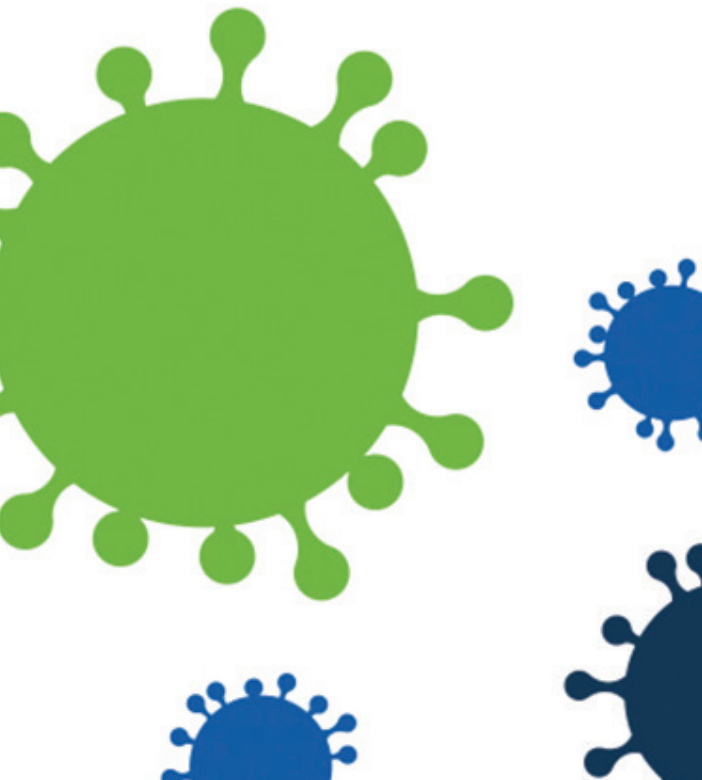
**S-Speech Difficulty**

**T-Time Loss is Brain Loss**

Do not let fear and misinformation keep you or a loved one from going to the hospital to be treated. Strokes can be deadly or lead to serious disability. The sooner you get help, the better!

Remember these simple steps in during the Covid 19 crisis, wash your hands, maintain social distancing, wear a mask, avoid touching your mouth, nose and eyes and stay home if you are sick!

The Minnesota Stroke Association is available for questions, concerns, resources and provides daily phone coverage Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Call us at 763-553-0088. Our offices remain closed at this time and we are working remotely, but messages are checked every 15 minutes and routed to the proper individual to address and provide a return phone call. Remember if it's a medical emergency, call 911. Time Loss is Brain Loss.



# live every moment every day

By Phil Gonzales,  
Public Awareness Associate

The Twin Cities arts scene was hit particularly hard by the COVID shutdown as venues shuttered their box offices to curtail the spread of the virus. While these sacrifices to our entertainment were necessary for public safety, too often audiences and entertainers alike neglected to think of the sudden loss of community this brought about for the people who worked these venues.

Production staff were suddenly isolated from one another and, for one staff member already living with the potentially isolating effects of stroke, this lack of connection hit particularly hard.

Michael Lord is a stroke survivor who, up until the shutdown hit, had been the Assistant Director of Events at the Cedar Cultural Center, a non-profit music venue operating in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood since 1989. Michael made sure the show went on, that people got paid and that everyone got fed.

The job gave him a great community to be a part of and let him indulge in a great life's passion: music."

"It started really early, going to garage sales with my mom and buying Beatles albums," he says, "And she loved Elvis and, you know, I found KISS in sixth grade and I've been all over the map since then. But, just to have that whole lifestyle pulled away from you like, it's just terrible."

Michael's stroke didn't hit him all at once. Like so many strokes, his rolled in gradually. It was subtle enough at first that he chose to ignore the signs.

"I ignored it in the sense that I didn't pursue any help. I didn't go to the doctor; I tried to be okay. This will get better over time, but it didn't."

Michael's roommate suspected something was wrong because Michael seemed to be having trouble with his speech. But, Michael brushed aside his concerns and went to work. His boss at the Cedar, Mark, also noticed that Michael wasn't operating at full capacity, his upper body strength had diminished noticeably by this point, and Michael finally gave him the whole story. After talking with a doctor friend about Michael's condition, Mark dropped everything and rushed Michael to the emergency room.

In the hospital, doctors discovered that not only had Michael experienced a stroke, but he also had undiagnosed diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

"I'd been an athlete in high school and I watched myself gain weight as I got older and, you know, people started to call me big fella, big guy. And I knew I was overweight. And I knew that there were probably other things wrong with me, but I'd never got checked out. I mean, it was decades since I'd been to the doctor."

And at the heart of Michael's story lies that simple fact: he hadn't gone to the doctor in decades. One of the reasons Michael wanted to share his story was to help shake men out of the habit of avoiding looking into their own health. Surveys into the subject have revealed that up to two-thirds of men avoid going to the doctor until the



Photos  
by Robert  
Possehl

last minute and that 37 percent withhold information from their doctors. The reasons for this are complex, but Michael believes it has to do with outdated ideas of masculinity and, for single men, an absence of having someone there to motivate you.

Michael was lucky to have a supportive group of friends and a sister who lives in Chanhassen, so for the three days he spent in the hospital he had plenty of company. And, once he was out of the hospital, he had a good support team to help him get back on his feet. But, Michael also realized he had to find motivation inside himself if he was going to get back in fighting trim.

“I was focusing on the things that they asked me to do to get better. And to go to those, you know, the three different therapy things they wanted me to do: speech therapy and both physical therapy and occupational therapy. I was on board with everything.



“The cliché is, you know, live every moment every day. And that’s certainly true for me now, whereas before, it was just like, whatever. I mean, I love my life; I’m super grateful for my life. But to have a scary thing like that happen is a wake up call. And, this is more diabetes specific, but people that don’t address those diagnoses and situations and end up you know, losing toes and feet and life. I don’t want it to be me.”

Michael started making incremental changes in his life, reevaluating his living space and losing sixty pounds. He started liking, more and more, the man he saw in the mirror.

“I was wearing all button down shirts, to try and hide my belly which I wasn’t able to do. But I hated the way I looked in t-shirts. But now, I can wear my t-shirts that I had in high school again. I never thought I’d see that. But, a lot of my big boy shirts and stuff are going across the street to the thrift store for someone else to use.”

Michael completed his therapies at Courage Kenny Rehabilitation Institute at Abbott Northwestern Hospital and began attending their stroke support group, which he found very beneficial. It was through this group that he made a mask for the Minnesota Brain Injury Alliance/Minnesota Stroke Association Unmasking Brain Injury In Minnesota Project.

“I don’t consider myself a great artist or whatever, but I do come from a visual arts background. I actually went to the Art Institute of Chicago for a year. So I did a kind of a KISS mask, but it was speaking to my love of music and my bliss that I hadn’t lost. My ability to remember and enjoy and love music and still do. Always will.”

While the Cedar Cultural Center waits for the end of the pandemic, Michael volunteers for his friend’s record store in St. Paul, something that allows him to help out while also getting back in touch with music.

“It’s been such a beautiful diversion during this pandemic, because I’m not working, and I’m very capable of not getting up and getting dressed and taking a shower. So it’s given me a little bit of purpose and a schedule. And I’m really grateful to my friend, Mike, for that. I file records and 45s and stuff. And then he insists on giving me store credit. So I often come home with new records.”

And, Michael remains adamant about getting to the doctor and taking care of your health before it becomes an issue.

“If you can do it before something happens to you, it’d be much better. I was so grateful that I really wasn’t affected cognitively and my memories are still there. My love of music is still there. I remember my music. I’m so grateful for that, that I wasn’t stripped of it. As I know, you can be. I mean, you guys know all the difference in the severity of stroke, you know what can happen to you. I struggled with my language, my speech, and still do a little bit. But I’ve learned to try to slow it down and enunciate. And, you know, it’s an ongoing process, but it’s one I have embraced. And I just keep trying to get better.”

# 2021 VIRTUAL STRIDES FOR STROKE WALK GEARS UP



# MAY 15 10AM

By Pat Marciniak  
Media Coordinator

Many of you were with us in 2020 when we took our first ever Virtual Strides for Stroke walk. With social distancing and limitations on people gathering we will be going virtual again this year on May 15 at 10 a.m.

Last year we missed the hugs, hearing your stories and seeing everyone face to face, but we did get to connect through the awesome photos, videos and updates on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram that you sent us. We walked in solidarity for stroke awareness and to honor the people we serve and their loved ones, in our neighborhoods and parks throughout Minnesota. All of our locations came together as one.

For those of you that may not have taken part last year or are new to Strides for Stroke we want you to take a walk in whatever way is most convenient and safe for you and your loved ones. And we want you to take pictures, shoot videos, record your experience and share it with us.

We are still counting on you to set up your Strides for Stroke team at [strokemn.org](http://strokemn.org), set a monetary goal for your team and write something about yourself or the person you are supporting so we know your story. Sharing your story can help others in so many ways. Invite family, coworkers, neighbors and friends who may not live in the state now or that you haven't seen all year to join your team. That's what makes the virtual aspect fun. Teams can consist of anyone you know who is willing to join locally or from afar. It's a great way of reconnecting and sharing your story



**REGISTER &  
DONATE NOW**

with them. Make sure they join your team and let them know they can take a walk in their own neighborhood, city or state and still raise stroke awareness and funds.

In addition, all of the generous donations that each of you give can still be made at [strokemn.org](http://strokemn.org) or mailed to our office. Our lives were rocked by economic stress but those who could have continued to donate to help those we serve and to provide the free programs that keep the Minnesota Stroke Association strong.

This year's pre-Walk program will be hosted on our website with Fox 9 anchor, Tim Blotz and KOOL 108 radio host, Lee Valsvik kicking things off. **Stay up to date with details at [strokemn.org](http://strokemn.org).**

In 2020 and now, stroke doesn't stop and neither do we. The stroke community and its supporters are resilient. You're a part of our family. We care about you and want to remain here for you. It's tough not being in one place but we'll get back there and we'll be walking together again, taking one step at a time to a better tomorrow.



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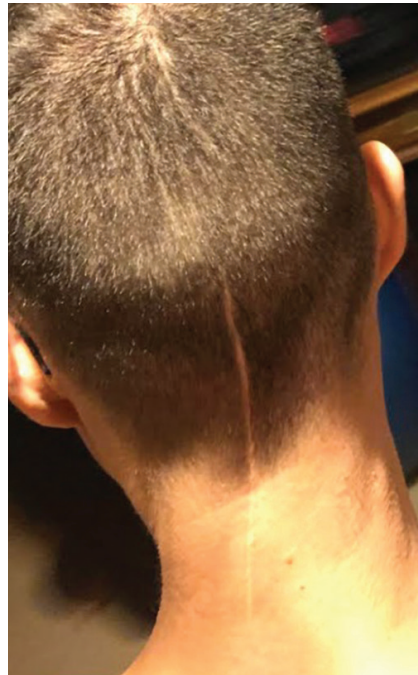


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[hennepinhealthcare.org/stroke](http://hennepinhealthcare.org/stroke) | For more information 612-873-8712

# LEWIS MITCHEL — IF YOU'VE SEEN ONE STROKE; YOU'VE ONLY SEEN ONE STROKE

By Phil Gonzales, Public Awareness Associate



It was October 7, 2012, and Lewis Mitchel was feeling fine. He'd had a slight headache during the day, but nothing that was going to make him miss spending time with his kids. At home, he jumped in the shower to cool off and hopefully take a little bit of the edge off of his increasingly pounding head. He got himself about eighty percent dressed when his aneurysm burst.

"I felt that thing and heard it," he says, "Thank God my daughters were there."

Jumping into action, his daughters called 9-1-1 as Lewis eased himself onto the floor so he wouldn't fall. Once he knew the paramedics were on their way, he attempted to get up and climb onto the couch.

"And everything gave out," he remembers, "Arms, legs, everything was out. I tried to army crawl but my arms didn't work so it was more of a worm wiggle thing, but I made it to my couch. I remember the whole ordeal. It was really bad. It's kind of cool that I remember, but not cool that I do. It was just a bad ordeal."

The paramedics wheeled Lewis onto the ambulance, put a mask on his face and he woke up a month later at North Memorial with no idea what had happened.

"I was at North Memorial for two and half months," Lewis says, "Went over to Courage Center [Courage Kenny Rehabilitation Center at Abbott Northwestern] and was there for nine months doing therapy and rehab. So, as the years and the therapies went on, I was in a chair. For four years. And doctors said I'd never drive again, and maybe never walk. Well, you tell me 'no?' That I can't do something? Well, challenge accepted! Now I'm driving all over the place as if nothing ever happened. So, all the physical stuff will come back, it just takes a long time. But, thank God I still have my memories and my personality is all intact. I'm still the same smarta—."

Lewis's aneurysm could not have been predicted. He was young, only 35, and in top physical condition. His aneurysm could have been in his head his entire life just biding its time. What is important is that his daughters, only 10 and 9 at the time, had the presence of mind to call the

paramedics and get him straight to the hospital. That quick thinking may have saved his life.

And with his life saved, Lewis decided to turn his life towards helping others.

“Now that I’m doing good, the way I see it was the Courage Center was so good to me, it was time to give back.”

Lewis volunteered for two years at Courage Kenny as a greeter. Then he volunteered at Methodist Hospital.

“Most people don’t realize how lucky they are. And it felt good to give back. What pushed me through was I thought I’d had it really rough. And for the first year or two I was mad at everybody. But slowly I started to realize I’m actually pretty fortunate. It can be a whole lot worse! There’s people out there in really bad situations. So, that was my drive: to get back out there and volunteer and now I want to spread the word!”

Unfortunately, like so many people living with a disability, Lewis has found himself cut off by the shutdown.

have no idea. You think you may get it? But man you’re way off.”

Lewis finds this lack of understanding part of the reason he needs to share his story. Because, as he says, “It’s not always ponies and rainbows. The world is not right for [us]. When there’s someone in a wheelchair, people are so rude and mean. You have no idea. Sit in a wheelchair for a day, just a day. I was in one for four years but do it for just a day. And then try opening doors, taking an elevator. Doing all your daily everyday routines. My hands didn’t work. I couldn’t talk. Wear some oven mitts for one day. Sit in a wheelchair. You’ll see how that life is.”

Today, as he’s said, Lewis can walk, he can drive, he’s gotten to watch his daughters grow up and get ready to move out on their own. And he continues to work at his independence and his mobility and living his life to its fullest.

“And my message is ‘never give up.’ People may say that – don’t give up – and it’s really tough. But if you



“I spent years and years trying to fit in somewhere,” he says, “find some people with understanding. I finally found a community of like 30 other stroke victims. We’re all family, a little bit. COVID shut everything down. I miss my family. Cause nobody really gets it. Nobody. People say, ‘Oh, I understand.’ No, you really

look at the survival rates of aneurysm, it’s like twelve percent or something like that, and for me to come back driving and walking? If you think you can’t do something, well you can’t. If you think you can, it may take a while but you’ll get there.”



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