

Stroke care: Brenda's story

This is the story of Brenda Nixon who is 67 years old and had a stroke in 2009.

"I didn't know I had a stroke. My husband realised through the FAST adverts on TV that I had a stroke. I had no drop in my face, I just had mixed speech. He took me to the doctors as I couldn't see, couldn't hear and I couldn't speak. I was in a reasonably bad way but it hadn't taken over any of my limbs so that was a plus for me I suppose. The doctor came in and my husband said "I think she needs to go to the hospital, so please could you ring them and I will take her straight away", they rang through and we went off to the hospital in our car. Of course I didn't really understand what was going on at that stage. We got to the hospital and we were seen; I don't know what type of room; I just remember being in a room and being examined. Then I was taken to the assessment ward, and the doctors came to see me.

I had started to get a small line in my vision and I could just slightly see. They asked me questions and then I was admitted to a ward on the geriatric side. I didn't understand a lot of what went on I was disorientated, I was like that for a couple of days. Everybody was so kind to me but I was very anxious. As time went on I was scared of going out of the room or even getting to the toilet, I didn't even shower for a couple of days. It wasn't until my daughter visited and asked if I had had a shower that I told her I had been too scared to leave my room.

Because I physically looked well and had looked this way since my stroke, people don't realise that my head had been affected and I was extremely anxious. That's been the most difficult part for me. I've accepted that I've had a stroke and I want to get back to better health. I know it will never be perfect but that has been the aim from the start.

I started to get more comfortable with the nurses and being on the ward, it wasn't until I was moved to the stroke ward where I saw a lot of people that were really poorly, that I realised how lucky I had been. I can't fault any of what I saw or the care that I experienced. I was encouraged to start do things on my own; taking showers and moving around the ward, the nurses were always on hand to assist me I was in hospital for a total of 8 days, during that time my vision started to get better, my speech still wasn't great and I often would get things mixed up, my family and the nurses thankfully could understand me. My experience in hospital was brilliant. I couldn't fault it.

When I went back for my six week check, I could talk a bit better and I could get about, everything was still slow and I couldn't understand why I was feeling like this, but as time has gone by that has changed. At the check, when I was being discharged, I asked the specialist if I could I see someone about my head (a neurologist). I wanted to know what was going on in my head and why things weren't

working like before. I was told there would be a long wait but I didn't mind I just wanted someone to answer my questions.

I went to see a neurologist (Caroline) and it was the best thing that ever happened to me! On the first meeting, she explained things to me and that it was normal for things to be a little slow. She was my lifeline. Only through her have I gotten as good as I have, because I took notice of everything she said. I write things down now as I don't always remember, and I keep a diary. One of the first projects she advised me to do was around the use of the telephone, I couldn't speak on the telephone, and I couldn't answer the telephone. I would often panic when the phone rang and that was a horrendous time. Slowly but surely she gave some simple things to do that helped, like planning what I wanted to say on the telephone before I made a call. Taking simple steps made me less likely to panic.

Of course I didn't always do it right and I still don't even now, but that worked. Everything she said to me and everything she talked about was common sense really for everybody else, and it would have been to me if I hadn't have had a stroke. I know I got the best care through the Stroke team and the Neurologist so I recommend that anyone who has had a stroke on whatever scale, that they see someone like her. Cause once you have a stroke and you accept it how it changes you, they help you accept even more."

Brenda has since set up a support group called Bolton West Stroke Group, and is also a member of NHS Bolton Clinical Commissioning Group Equality Target Action Group (ETAG).