

Smart Move Helped ‘Santa’ Avoid Stroke Complications

Health Care Veteran Knew He Just Didn’t Feel Right

ROME, Ga., Dec. 2, 2024 – At first, Allen Stephens thought he was just having a bad migraine.

The assistant director of Oncology Services at Atrium Health Floyd was at work this past May, performing some CPR exercises when he noticed he just didn’t feel right.

“Two of the fingers on my right hand just felt tired and I was a little dizzy,” said Stephens, who also leads the outpatient infusion center at Floyd Medical Center and has served in health care for more than three decades.

He said he thought about driving home, but had a feeling that just wasn’t the right thing to do. He called a teammate, and they decided to go to the Emergency Care Center at Atrium Health Floyd.

Stephen said he was glad he paid attention his inner voice. It turned out that at the age of 55 and in relatively good health, he was experiencing symptoms of a stroke.

A CT scan showed nothing, but an MRI determined he had a stroke. Stephens suggested that a recent, long flight to Hawaii may have played a role in his condition. He also said doctors at Floyd discovered he had a small hole in his heart, which had gone undiagnosed prior to his visit to the ECC.

He was treated with aspirin and Plavix, which prevents blood clots. He is still taking medication for his cardiac issue, but will be off that soon.

Stephens said is grateful to have yet another holiday season portraying Saint Nick, which he has been doing for three decades. He said at his age he is glad that he no longer needs any help coming up with a white beard.

Saint Nick will visit the Atrium Health Floyd Medical Center lobby this Thursday and again on Dec. 12, from 6 to 8 p.m. Bring your camera or cell phone and take a picture with Santa. Donations will be accepted to help Cancer Navigators provide support services for cancer patients.

“I am just glad I went to get checked out,” said Stephens. “I don’t know what would have happened if I had tried to drive home.” Ignoring stroke symptoms can be a deadly decision.

Stroke is the fifth leading cause of death and the leading cause of disability among adults. Recognizing the signs of stroke and getting medical treatment as quickly as possible could improve the outcome.

Use BE FAST to help you recognize the signs of a stroke:

- **Balance:** Is there a sudden problem with balance or a loss of coordination?
- **Eyes:** Is there a sudden loss of vision in one or both eyes, or sudden blurriness or double vision?
- **Face:** Ask the person to smile. Are one or both sides of the face numb or drooping?
- **Arms:** Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward? Is there weakness or numbness in one arm or on one side of the body?

- **Speech:** Is the person suddenly slurring words, difficult to understand or unable to speak? Can the person correctly repeat simple phrases?
- **Time:** If you notice any of these symptoms, even if they go away, call 911 immediately!

Atrium Health Floyd Medical Center has received Advanced Certification as a Primary Stroke Center in conjunction with Get with the Guidelines® - Stroke Gold Plus Recognition from the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association.

Hospitals that earn this certification:

- Have an acute stroke team available 24/7 that can be at the bedside within 15 minutes
- Provide surgical services 24/7
- Provide designated beds for stroke patients
- Offer clot busting medication

What is your stroke risk? Visit <http://bit.ly/4fbwNwA> to take Atrium Health Floyd's free, online assessment.

About Atrium Health Floyd

The [Atrium Health Floyd](#) family of health care services is a leading medical provider and economic force in northwest Georgia and northeast Alabama. Atrium Health Floyd is part of Charlotte, North Carolina-based [Advocate Health](#), the third-largest nonprofit health system in the United States, created from the combination of [Atrium Health](#) and Advocate Aurora Health. Atrium Health Floyd strategically combined with Harbin Clinic in 2024 and employs more than 5,200 teammates who provide care in over 40 medical specialties at four facilities: Atrium Health Floyd Medical Center – a 361-bed full-service, acute care hospital and regional referral center in Rome, Georgia; Atrium Health Floyd Polk Medical Center in Cedartown, Georgia; and Atrium Health Floyd Cherokee Medical Center in Centre, Alabama; and Atrium Health Floyd Medical Center Behavioral Health, also in Rome. Together, Atrium Health Floyd and Harbin Clinic provide primary care, specialty care and urgent care throughout northwest Georgia and northeast Alabama. Atrium Health Floyd also operates a stand-alone emergency department in Chattooga County, the first such facility to be built from the ground-up in Georgia.

About Atrium Health

[Atrium Health](#) is a nationally recognized leader in shaping health outcomes through innovative research, education and compassionate patient care. Based in Charlotte, North Carolina, Atrium Health is part of [Advocate Health](#), the third-largest nonprofit health system in the United States, which was created from the combination with Advocate Aurora Health. A recognized leader in experiential medical education and groundbreaking research, [Wake Forest University School of Medicine](#) is its academic core. Atrium Health is renowned for its top-ranked pediatric, cancer and heart care, as well as organ transplants, burn treatments and specialized musculoskeletal programs. Atrium Health is also a leading-edge innovator in virtual care and mobile medicine, providing care close to home and in the home. Ranked nationally among U.S. News & World Report's Best Hospitals in eight pediatric specialties and for rehabilitation, Atrium Health has also received the American Hospital Association's Quest for Quality Prize and its 2021 Carolyn Boone Lewis Equity of Care Award, as well as the 2020 Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Health Equity Award for its efforts to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in care. With a commitment to every community it serves, Atrium Health seeks to improve health, elevate hope and advance healing – for all, providing \$2.8 billion last year in free and uncompensated care and other community benefits.

About Advocate Health

[Advocate Health](#) is the third-largest nonprofit integrated health system in the United States – created from the combination of Advocate Aurora Health and [Atrium Health](#). Providing care under the names [Advocate Health Care](#) in Illinois, Atrium Health in the Carolinas, Georgia and Alabama, and [Aurora Health Care](#) in Wisconsin, Advocate Health is a national leader in clinical innovation, health outcomes, consumer experience and value-based care. Headquartered in Charlotte, North Carolina, Advocate Health services nearly 6 million patients and is engaged in hundreds of clinical trials and research studies, with [Wake Forest University School of Medicine](#) serving as the academic core of the enterprise. It is nationally recognized for its expertise in cardiology, neurosciences, oncology, pediatrics and rehabilitation, as well as organ transplants, burn treatments and specialized musculoskeletal programs. Advocate Health employs 155,000 teammates

across 69 hospitals and over 1,000 care locations, and offers one of the nation's largest graduate medical education programs with over 2,000 residents and fellows across more than 200 programs. Committed to providing equitable care for all, Advocate Health provides nearly \$6 billion in annual community benefits.

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