

Neighbors: Local women talk stroke recovery

MICHELLE RASBERRY Special to the Daily Dunklin Democrat



Photo by Michelle Rasberry, special to the Daily Dunklin Democrat Jan Sanders, left, and Mary Jean Moore, right, recently shared stories about their life changing procedure that is helping them in their recovery from strokes.

If something seems too good to be true, it usually is. That is the thought that kept running through Mark Moore's mind when he first read the article his father, Max Ray Moore, had found about a new procedure that helps many patients reverse the effects of stroke.

Nine years earlier, Moore's wife, Mary Jean, suffered a stroke which impaired the right side of her body.

"I didn't want to get Mary Jean's hopes up and I was a bit skeptical," said Moore. "But, at the same time I really wanted to know if there really was something that could help her," he said.

Moore began looking into the procedure - a single dose of the anti-inflammatory medicine etanercept delivered to the brain - and was encouraged by what he was learning. He then called his son, Andrew, an oncologist at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, who in turn discussed the procedure with his colleagues in the neurology department.

Confident that "the worst that could happen would be that the treatment would just not do anything," he told Mary Jean about it. "As she read through the information she was just grinning the whole time," he said.

"I put the papers down and said 'let's pack our bags,'" said Mary Jean with a laugh.

The Moores called the office of Dr. Edward Tobinick in Boca Raton, Fla., who is the only doctor currently offering the procedure. After a phone consultation, it was determined that Mary Jean was a candidate for the procedure.

"One of my first thoughts after that phone call was 'I have to tell Jan (Sanders) about this!'" Mary Jean said as she reached over and patted the hand of her friend and fellow stroke victim. "So Mark called her daughter Lisa (Johnson) so she could look into it just like he did and see if it could work for her, too," she said.

Both women were candidates and received the treatment two days apart and both have experienced remarkable results.

"The results were nearly immediate with Mary Jean," said Mark. "She had her head down because the shot goes into the back of the neck and her eyes closed and within 20 seconds I saw the biggest smile come across her face and I realized it must be working," he said. "After less than a minute the doctor began asking Mary Jean questions and with every sentence - nearly every word - you could hear her annunciation getting better and better," he added.

Three minutes after the shot, Mary Jean could hear it, too. "She started saying 'oh my goodness! Oh my goodness!' and the doctor asked what it was and she said 'that's the voice I had nine years ago,'" added Moore.

"I did! It was amazing. I hadn't heard that voice in quite some time," she said with a smile. Dr. Tobinick then asked if she had any cloudiness in her thoughts. Moore laughed as he remembered the answer his wife gave the doctor. "She said, 'Have you seen the Claritin commercial where everything is foggy and then they take the medicine and it is suddenly clear? That is exactly how I feel right now.' I knew without a doubt then that it had worked."

"When we went down to Florida, I had Mark rent a convertible," said Mary Jean. "It was so nice to feel the sun on my face after the shot," she said. "I couldn't wait to call Jan and tell her about it," she added.

Two days later, Sanders would have similar results.

"My biggest issue following the stroke was with my hearing," said Sanders. "I could understand one-on-one, in-person conversations, but if there were any other sounds, everything became distorted. Often times, I would speak to my grandchildren on the phone and just say 'Oh, yes, that's good' not really knowing what they were saying," she added.

Like Mary Jean, her results were almost immediate.

"They perform a battery of tests before and after the procedure to gauge the improvement in mobility and mental clarity," said Sanders. "I knew if nothing else, I had some benefit because I could hear so much clearer before they even started the tests following the shot," she said.

The enormity of the benefit to Sanders was realized when she left the office building. "The day of my appointment was such a beautiful day and the hotel was very close to the office, so we walked," said Sanders. "When we left the appointment and got outside, it was astounding," she said. "I could hear everything! I could make out different sounds, the cars going by, birds, people talking - I could hear and understand it all," she said beaming. "I can now hear the grandchildren as clear as a bell on the phone and they are all getting used to hearing my new voice as well," she added.

Both women continue to see improvements in their physical and mental abilities, but the impact on their morale is immeasurable. "I assumed that eventually doctors would discover a way to erase or at least alleviate some of the impact of stroke on the mind and body, but I never dreamed it would be in my lifetime," said Sanders.

"We know there were so many who have prayed for us over the years and we feel this was an answer to those prayers," said Mary Jean Moore.