

Our Story



A Stroke Of Luck... Sort Of...

By Lauren Linhard

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Ashley Scherkenbach was finishing up in the bathroom at a Christmas party when she suddenly started to feel funny. As she grabbed the counter to steady herself, her right side went slack and she fell to the floor. She attempted to call for help, but couldn't get the words out.

Sitting there in panic, Ashley thought to herself, "This is not how it goes down." She took some breaths, waited until she could move again and slowly made her way out to the crowd. Though Ashley still wasn't sure what had happened, one of the party-goers knew after seeing the right side of Ashley's face drooping.

"I couldn't believe it. I had had a stroke," said Ashley, who didn't know what HHT was at the time. "I was incredibly lucky to fully recover within minutes. I bounced back right away, but that isn't usually the case."

When Ashley was tested for possible causes of stroke, doctors found a hole in her heart called a patent foramen ovale and recommended she join a study determining if the closing of a PFO could prevent future strokes.

It was when Ashley's echo test showed a lot of strange "bubbles" in her lungs that doctors started suspecting a different cause of the stroke: Hereditary Hemorrhagic Telangiectasia.

"I knew my grandfather had Osler-Weber-Rendu, but I didn't know it caused anything but nosebleeds, and I rarely had those," Ashley said, also confirming the diagnosis at Froedtert and Medical College of Wisconsin HHT Center. "If I had known about HHT, I wouldn't have had the stroke."

The diagnosis explained the red spots she's always had on her tongue and the awful migraines she'd get on a daily basis.

Ashley has since been screened for brain AVMS and had her lung AVMS embolized. She also started encouraging other members of the family to get tested, including her mother who gets regular nosebleeds.

"It's a day at the doctors compared to a lifetime of stroke recovery," Ashley said. "HHT is not something you can prevent, but you can prevent future obstacles from HHT."



Knowing about HHT has empowered Ashley to know she is making the best personal choices when it comes to major life decisions because she has all the information and understands the risks. That level of comfort is invaluable, Ashley said.

With her procedure behind her and a better understanding of the disease, Ashley has rededicated herself to living life to the fullest and on her own terms.

"I don't want this to prevent me from living my life; I won't let it," Ashley said. "Despite the questions and uncertainty, I'm a fighter and I'm going to keep going."