

Stroke of Good Fortune

A Baton Rouge man wasn't gambling on being rushed to a Kansas City hospital during a business trip. But he hit the jackpot when he landed at Saint Luke's

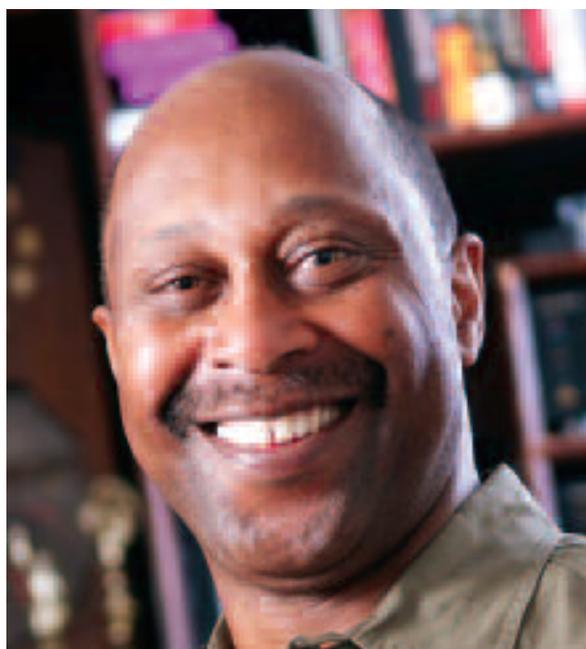
What are the odds that a seemingly healthy 48-year-old man could suffer a severe stroke 629 miles from home, only to be taken to one of the country's few hospitals that has a stroke team available 24/7 to use a device for removing the blood clot in the brain artery that precipitated the stroke?

And just to up the ante: He suffered the stroke in a place where there are no clocks. Yet timing is everything when it comes to preventing the severe disability that a stroke can cause.

So it was that Kina Wright Sr. of Baton Rouge, La., was in Kansas City last Nov. 14 on business and found himself inside the Ameristar Casino—even though he had no intentions of gambling.

"I'm not a betting man," Wright said. "It was only the second time in my life I've been to a casino."

He'd come with his colleagues for supper, not the slots. It was about 8 p.m.—hard to say for certain, since clocks are not to be found in casinos. Wright had come out of the restaurant



What stroke? Doctors at Saint Luke's Brain and Stroke Institute were able to remove the clot in Kina Wright's brain so quickly, he didn't even know he'd had a stroke.

and was strolling across the casino floor. He didn't see it coming.

"It just hit me—bam!" he said. "In a couple of seconds, I was down."

Although Wright doesn't recall collapsing onto the casino floor, he vaguely remembers the ambulance ride. It seemed that one of the EMS people was saying something to him, but what? Wright couldn't hear him. In fact, he could barely see him.

Then he passed out again.

"The next thing I remember was waking up and being strapped into a hospital bed and wondering why," said Wright. "I felt just fine."

Uncorked

That's because the team at Saint Luke's Brain and Stroke Institute had worked quickly to dissolve the blood clot in his brain with an intravenous medication that reversed the stroke.

"It was quite a dense stroke," said Naveed Akhtar, M.D., a neurointerventional radiologist at Saint Luke's. "Without intervention, Mr. Wright probably would not have been able to speak or move his right side. It

would have taken him months to recover, and he would have had permanent disability.”

Instead, it took less than an hour for Dr. Akhtar to deploy the MERCI Retrieval System, a mechanical device that removed Wright’s clot. Saint Luke’s has used the device in more than 350 cases, making it the most experienced in the world with the device.

Wright had played his cards right. He’d ended up in the right place within the right time frame.

While Wright was sedated, Dr. Akhtar threaded a catheter into an artery in Wright’s leg. Up and up the device went, until it reached the artery in Wright’s brain where the clot was lodged.

Dr. Akhtar then pierced the clot with the device, which resembles a corkscrew. It fastened onto the clot and removed it much the way a corkscrew uncorks a bottle of wine. Dr. Akhtar could make up to six “passes” with the MERCI Retriever to get the clot out.

He got it on the first pass.

“Mr. Wright was one of our fastest MERCI patients,” he said. “The clot was out in 10 minutes.”

On a time clock

Less than four hours had elapsed since Wright had been brought to the hospital. Another four hours, and the window of opportunity for treatment would have been closed forever. Unlike casinos, strokes keep very much to a time clock.

It should have taken Wright 12 to 24 hours before he recovered his movement and speech. Here again, he seemed to beat the odds.

“I got up that afternoon and walked around,” Wright said. “I wasn’t even dizzy. Even the doctor was amazed.”

Dr. Akhtar agreed: “He did very well; he was one of our best patients.”

The big win

Wright’s friend and colleague, Ronnie Baker, had been with him when he collapsed. He told Wright later that he had been convinced Wright would never be the same.

“The next day he came into my room and saw me sitting up and laughing with one of the nurses,” recalled Wright. “He was overwhelmed.”

As was Wright when he learned what the Saint Luke’s team had done. There wasn’t even a scar. The only evidence that they had gone into his brain and removed the clot was a hole the size of a pin in his upper leg.

The next day, Wright was discharged from the hospital. He and his son, who’d flown in to see him, had dinner and celebrated by walking about five miles around Kansas City. Wright was back to work in Baton Rouge that Monday.

He’s since gone back to working out. And even though his cholesterol is good and he doesn’t smoke or drink, he now eats right, he says, five days out of seven.

“I’ve told my doctor here about the procedure at Saint Luke’s, and he says he wants to know more about it,” Wright said. “He said it sounded like an amazing thing.”

Bet on it. ✦



**“It just hit me—bam!
In a couple of seconds, I was down.”**

**—Kina Wright, who suffered no damage from his stroke
thanks to the fast work and an advanced intervention technique
by Saint Luke’s doctors**

**For more information about Saint Luke’s Brain and Stroke Institute, call NurseLine
at (816) 932-6220 or visit our Web site at saintlukeshealthsystem.org.**

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