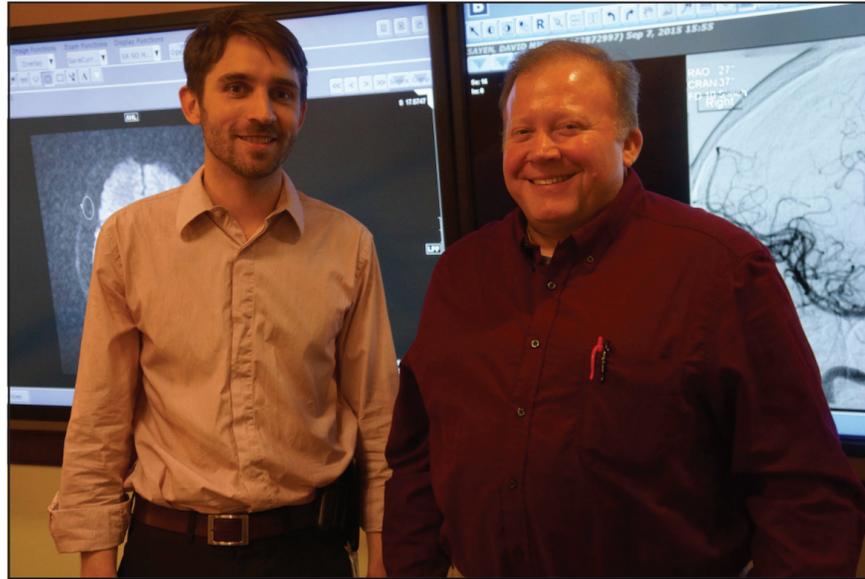


# Frederick County man has dramatic recovery after stroke

## Winchester Medical Center unique in area in offering life-saving procedure



At left is Winchester Medical Center Interventional Neurologist Dan-Victor Giurgiutiu, MD who performed life-saving neurosurgery on David Sayen of Frederick County (right) to remove a blood clot in his brain.

By Dan McDermott  
Warren & Frederick County Report

Geography has its benefits when a life-threatening event occurs and you are close to people who can fix it. This was demonstrated in September when a stroke victim was able to have a serious clot removed from his brain at Winchester Medical Center about 90 minutes after the initial onset of symptoms. The Valley Health campus is the only facility in the Northern Shenandoah Valley with an interventional neurologist capable of performing the procedure.

The hour or more saved by not having to be transported to another

hospital can mean the difference between a full recovery or being in a wheelchair or a nursing home for the rest of your life.

Then 46-year-old David Sayen of Frederick County was sitting on his couch around noon Labor Day thinking about what to do the rest of his afternoon off. His wife was sitting opposite him and his son was upstairs.

"It almost seemed like the air was leaving the room. The effect was almost like you cupped your hands and put them over your ears and it felt a little bit like a pressure change like if you go up in an airplane and your ears pop. It was very similar to that. Then I started to get confused where

I wasn't sure what was really happening, where I was," Sayen said.

"From the base of my neck a real hot pain shot up the center of my skull and it literally went all the way to the front. If you've ever stuck your hand in an electrical socket, it was similar to that and very hot and it was very fast. It went all the way to

the front and then it went all the way back again down the base of my neck. Then my left arm went numb.

"The feelings of confusion began to get worse and worse until I couldn't even formulate a thought. I was trying to figure out what was happening and the only thing I could think of [given] the area being affected on my body was that this could be a stroke.

"I have a heart condition that runs in my family and I've been in atrial fibrillation before. I've gone in and out of that over the course of the last two or three years. I always knew stroke was a risk if you're not properly monitoring your health. (Atrial fibrillation is an irregular heartbeat caused by incorrect or out-of-sync electrical signals being sent to the upper and lower chambers of the heart.)

"I thought that might be it but I couldn't be sure because I'd never had a stroke before. And I couldn't even relay that to my wife. She happened to be sitting right there near me. She was watching me. My left arm was numb but it wasn't completely numb, like when your arm falls asleep and it starts to come back again. I kept rubbing my fingers with my right hand to see what was happening.

"My wife noticed this and said, 'What's wrong? What's wrong?'" And I couldn't tell her. She said, 'Look at me. Look at me.' When I tried to my eyes went all the way to my right. She got right in my face and I tried but I couldn't look right at her.

"Of course I started to get scared.

Everything you hear about a stroke, there's nothing good. You always hear about people either dying or winding up in a wheelchair or having long-term problems. I got really scared and confused. When I tried to talk to her my words were really slurred and I could hear that they were slurred and they didn't make any sense.

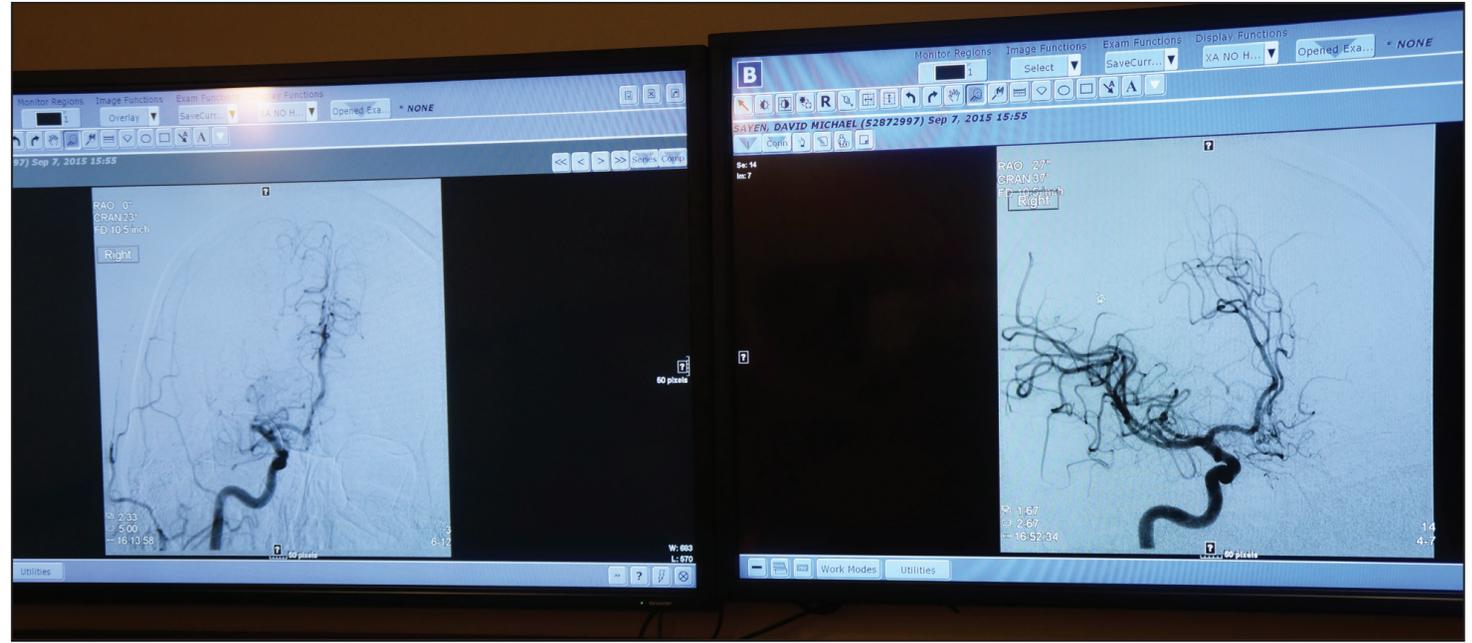
"She called 911 immediately and hollered for my son Matthew to come downstairs. He's in training for EMS and firefighter. He got on the phone with the dispatcher and told them to upgrade the call to stroke. He took my pulse and vital signs and waited for the ambulance to show up out front and waved them down."

Sayen was rushed to the Winchester Medical Center Emergency Room where he was quickly diagnosed as having suffered a stroke, which is in simplest terms when blood to a part of the brain is cut off, blocking the supply of oxygen and sugar.

"I'm the emergency room neurologist and you have a very long blood clot that's blocking the flow of blood to your brain and we need to go in and get that out and you've got about 15 minutes before it starts to do permanent damage. Are you okay with us doing the procedure to remove the clot?" he recalled being asked.

"Well sure, go ahead. No problem," Sayen replied.

The ER doctor introduced Sayen to interventional neurologist Dan-Victor Giurgiutiu, MD, who would perform the surgery.



Winchester Medical Center Interventional Neurologist Dan-Victor Giurgiutiu, MD displayed 'before and after' images of a front brain view of David Sayen of Frederick County. The left image shows the severely blocked flow of blood due to a long clot. The clot has been removed in the image on the right, showing a healthy brain. A dye is used to make the blood vessels show up clearly in the photos.

(Guided by imaging, interventional doctors will thread a long catheter—or tube—through a small incision in the femoral artery and up to the site, in this case the brain. They use that "tunnel" to deploy tools and devices to address issues within the vessel itself. Dr. Giurgiutiu extracted the clot through the catheter, explained one official later.)

"As they were doing the procedure, they walked me through the whole thing, told me where they were at, I'm almost there. You could feel something going on. You could hear a little bit of rustling. It almost reminded me of the sound of rubbing your thumb on a metal guitar string. He told me he was at the clot and you may feel a little bit of pain as we remove it. He started to pull it out and

there was a rush of pain that was a very excruciating headache and then a big release of pressure. It all happened really fast. They kept me in Intensive Care for a while to watch me. I was in the hospital for about a week.

Listening to Sayen explain his experience having a stroke was Dr. Giurgiutiu. "It's really interesting to get your perspective because I have in my mind what happens, to feel the heat and have all of your backup loose [blood] vessels open up to keep your brain alive and the confusion," he said. I don't doubt that he said it this way but it's a little confusing.

When Giurgiutiu examined Sayen, he saw that because the clot was so long—about 9mm to 10mm—even very strong blood thinners wouldn't

be enough to dissolve it. Surgery to remove the clot would be necessary to offer Sayen the best hope of recovery.

And strokes are serious. "The brain is the most energy intensive part of your body. It gets 20% of your blood flow. That's why it's more likely to get clots because there is so much blood flow... it doesn't resist a lack of blood flow well. To put it in perspective, if the heart doesn't get blood flow because of a blockage it takes 12 hours to get permanent damage. And that grows slowly but there's always a bit of the muscle that you can recover. For the brain you have 3 or 4 hours before a lot of permanent damage happens. A stroke can be sudden without a lot of warning," Giurgiutiu said.

Giurgiutiu noted that Sayen's experience of benefiting from an alert wife wasn't unique. "I'm reminded almost several times a day of the statistic that married women don't live any longer but married men definitely live longer than unmarried men. Hopefully we men can learn to return the favor as we grow older," he said.

Sayen thanked the WMC staff for reassuring him throughout the process that he would be okay and for delivering on that promise. He says he's taking his health much more seriously now and has lost 50 pounds. How, we asked? Cut the carbs and get out and move.

"I had gotten up in my weight where I didn't want to get off the couch and that contributes to all sorts of health problems," Sayen explained.

Dr. Giurgiutiu said movement is the most important factor to prevent strokes even beyond weight loss. "Don't eat between meals. Stay as active as you can. Park further away. Take the stairs. Find friends so you can support each other by walking. If you always wanted a pet, get a pet because those guys really never feel like not walking. Also be aware it's going to take a week where you're just getting used to it and you'll feel like

you're really pushing yourself before you start to see any improvement. Be patient because it takes a little time to see that improvement," he said.

Neuroscience Director Debby Massie agreed that was the best advice. "You try to tell people that it is really important to cut out the smoking, lose some weight and just move. Sometimes they just look at you and say, 'you've got to die of something,'" she said, bewildered.

And with that the sound of several pagers beeped through the room. "Code stroke," said one Valley Health employee. "In the ER."

As I gathered my things Dr. Giurgiutiu brushed past me on his way out the door.

He was in a hurry.  
—editor@warrencountyreport.com

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