

Healthy Living



ST. JOSEPH MERCY
PORT HURON
SAINT JOSEPH MERCY HEALTH SYSTEM

Robotic-Assisted Stroke Care Close to Home

M.L. Creamer
St. Joseph Mercy Hospital

Robin (Robbie) Cloetens – neatly dressed with a stylish hair cut – chats animatedly with her husband, Ben. It would be hard for anyone in the restaurant to guess that just two months ago Robbie faced a future of uncertainty.



A Meaningful Recovery... Robbie Cloetens shares a moment with husband Ben at their farm in Lakeport, MI. Robbie, who suffered a stroke in early September, received life-preserving treatment through an advanced telemedicine robot and the Michigan Stroke Network at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital. Robbie credits the technologically-advanced St. Joseph Mercy with saving her life.

But, in early September, the 54-year-old Lakeport resident suffered a stroke. It was her second in five years.

“I’m here because of one and only one reason,” she said. “I’m here because of St. Joseph Mercy Hospital. Their incredible high-tech care saved my life.”

That “high-tech care” involved the use of a Remote Presence Telemedicine robot, which provides stroke patients in the Blue Water and Thumb Area with the most advanced emergency care available, right here, close to home.

“It’s a great piece of technology that provides the most recent advances in stroke care along with the most highly-trained specialists,” Marcel Blais, RN, BSN, Director of Critical Care at St. Joseph Mercy, said. “We are able to offer a service at St. Joseph Mercy you wouldn’t normally get unless you were in a ‘big city’ hospital.”

Count to 100, and in that time two people will have suffered a stroke. That accounts for 750,000 strokes a year.

Stroke is the third leading cause of death in the United States and disables more adults than any other condition.

A stroke occurs when a blood vessel in the brain becomes blocked or bursts. The result can be as serious as brain damage or even death.

Common stroke symptoms include:

- Sudden unexplained confusion or loss of consciousness.
- Severe headache or sudden onset of paralysis, weakness, numbness or loss of coordination on one side of the body.
- Sudden loss of vision or double vision.
- Slurred speech or sudden inability to find words or understand what is said.
- Severe dizziness and loss of balance or coordination.

Prompt treatment is essential to protect a person’s brain cells.

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SJMPH's Remote Presence Telemedicine Robot...

A recent upgrade to the St. Joseph Mercy Port Huron Emergency Department, the new Michigan Stroke Network telemedicine robot offers advances available no where else in the community for the emergent treatment of stroke. The new self-propelled robot provides for one-to-one communication between the neuroendovascular specialists at St. Joseph Mercy Oakland and the clinical staff, patients and family members at St. Joseph Mercy Port Huron. New enhancements include an electronic stethoscope, otoscopes and ultrasound which can be connected to transmit medical data to the remote physician as well as a telephone for directed conversations.

The Most Advanced Stroke Care Available Locally

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At St. Joseph Mercy Port Huron (SJMPH), state of the art treatment is provided through its partnership with the Michigan Stroke Network (MSN).

Founded by sister hospital St. Joseph Mercy Oakland (SJMO) in collaboration with Trinity Health, the MSN offers the vehicle to deliver the most comprehensive stroke care available.

SJMPH's affiliation with the Michigan Stroke Network brings specialists and technology closer to home for emergency stroke patients, increasing the chance for successful rehabilitation and ultimately saving lives.

Through the use of telemedicine robots, the network ensures immediate access to stroke neurologists and neuroendovascular specialists at St. Joseph Mercy Oakland, in Pontiac, MI. In 2004, SJMO became the first health care institution in Michigan to receive Primary Stroke Center Certification by The Joint Commission.

The telemedicine robot allows MSN physicians to cross the state of Michigan with a one-to-one visual two-way consultation and interaction with the patient, family, and medical staff. The MSN specialist has the ability to be by the patient's bedside by remote presence and perform a neurological assessment. The telemedicine real-time audio/visual connection allows the physician to review diagnostics tests performed such as CT scans, electrocardiogram (ECG) monitoring, and laboratory results.

"It gives us the door-to-doctor time you need in emergent stroke treatment without the doctor actually being here," Marcel said.

Betty Falecki, RN, Emergency Department (ED) Manager at St. Joseph Mercy Port Huron, agreed. "Time is of the essence when it comes to dealing with a stroke. Our goal is to stabilize the patient and begin treatment. This gives us the time we need where a specialist can see a patient without the delay of transport."

The telemedicine robot did just that for Robbie in September.

Robbie suffered her first stroke in 2006. "At that time, I felt like someone slapped me down on my face and brought me back up, but I hadn't moved at all," she said.

As a result of the initial stroke, Robbie lost vision on her right side and spent four months in treatment and rehabilitation. She has since regained her sight. "It was a long road back," Ben Cloetens said. "But we never gave up."

Robbie's most recent stroke "was completely different," she said. "I was sitting at home and Ben was playing with the dog. I said something and my speech was garbled," she explained. "Ben asked me what was wrong, and I said I didn't know, but that I was going to go lay down. He said, 'Oh, no you're not. You're going to the hospital.'"

Upon arriving at SJMPH, Robbie was immediately evaluated. "I couldn't say foot or hand...the things I was trying to say," Robbie said. "I had already lost my ability to speak. I was scared."

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Robotic-Assisted Stroke Care Close to Home

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With the stroke diagnosis confirmed, the telemedicine robot was activated and the staff and the Cloetens were connected with Sunitha Santhakumar, MD, a MSN Vascular Neurologist, with SJMO and an Assistant Professor of Neurology at Wayne State University. After a thorough evaluation, Robbie received the clot-busting medication Activase (t-PA) to open the circulation in her brain.

"It was incredible," Robbie said. "The doctor was at home, but talking to me in our local hospital. I couldn't believe that."

"Dr. Santhakumar had Robbie's complete medical history at her fingertips. It truly was amazing," agreed Ben.

After beginning treatment, Robbie was transferred by ambulance to the Oakland County hospital. Dr. Santhakumar was waiting for them when they arrived. "She took my hand, patted it, and welcomed us," Robbie said.

Robbie spent two and a half days in the intensive care unit (ICU) and an additional four days on the neurological floor at SJMO.

"It was a completely different experience from my first stroke," she said. "I've said it before, but I truly believe I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for St. Joseph Mercy and the stroke robot."

Ben agreed, "Robbie has a very complicated medical history, and we've seen a lot of emergency rooms," he said. "There is no doubt she received the best treatment here.

"The team was like a well-oiled machine," Ben continued. "Normally, you go from hospital A to B, and have to start from scratch at the second hospital. Not with the stroke network. The second hospital already had everything, including all the medical records and were ready to roll. I really believe it makes a difference in the treatment and a person's recovery."

Dr. Santhakumar credits Ben's quick response for Robbie's recovery. Stroke patients have a three hour window in which they must be treated. Ben's fast action and our ability to start treatment with t-PA greatly enhanced her recovery process.

St. Joseph Mercy recently received its second Stroke Robot. The new robot not only allows for a full body view of the patient, but also has a telephone allowing for private conversations between the specialist and medical staff or family.

"The telephone helps to cut out the seeming chaos that comes with emergent treatment in an ED," Betty said. "The phone creates a calmer means of communication between the specialist and our care providers."

"If anyone has a stroke, I don't know why they wouldn't go to St. Joseph Mercy Port Huron. They were my lifesavers," Robbie concluded.

To learn more about this and other incredible advances in emergency care, visit St. Joseph Mercy online at mymercy.us.

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Editor: Stephanie Armstrong-Helton
810-984-1166
heltons@trinity-health.org

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