

Odyssey of an Aneurysm



While enduring another cold winter, Diane Jennings of Greenwich, Connecticut, was looking forward to a warm visit with her close Coachella Valley friends, Harry and Joy Goldstein. At 56, the energetic interior designer and non-profit organization president considered herself to be in good health, making sure that she ate right and exercised at least three times a week. Though unusual for her, she wasn't alarmed when, during a brisk afternoon walk, the pain of a severe headache began. She tried to ignore it. Soon, however, she would realize its seriousness and just how lucky she was to eventually find herself at Eisenhower Medical Center in Rancho Mirage.

It was the end of February 2004, the night of the Academy Awards. It was anything but an enjoyable evening for Diane as the pain of her now regularly occurring headaches increased to the point of vomiting. The next morning, Diane awoke to find bruises around her eyes. This prompted her to call her internist's office and speak with a nurse. Still, no warning flag or concern. A day or so later, Diane saw her gynecologist who wisely instructed her to have her headaches checked more thoroughly. That Thursday, she saw her internist and was relieved to hear the doctor say she was fine. So, Diane and her husband continued with their plans and left on a winter trip for California.

"We are most grateful for the highly sophisticated technology and expertise of Dr. Brian Herman who saved the life of our dear friend Diane Jennings. How fortunate we all are to have such extraordinary physicians and care at Eisenhower Medical Center. Today Diane is back East at home enjoying her normal lifestyle. We all feel blessed." – Harry and Joy Goldstein

With the internist's assurance and her eye bruises all but gone under makeup, Diane arrived in Los Angeles for a brief two-day stay, and then traveled on to Palm Springs.

Upon their arrival, Harry M. Goldstein, Chairman of the Board at Eisenhower Medical Center, and his wife, Joy, hosted a dinner party for the East Coast couple and several local friends. By chance, Diane was seated near Dr. Brian Herman, Chief of Radiology for Eisenhower Medical Center, the Medical Director of Eisenhower Imaging Center and one of only a few interventional neuroradiologists in the country.

As the evening progressed, Diane spoke candidly with Dr. Herman about the circumstances she endured over the past two weeks. Wishing not to alarm her, but recognizing the potential early signs of stroke, Dr. Herman gently persuaded Diane to have a neurovascular screening, an MRA (Magnetic Resonance Angiogram) scan of her brain, carotid arteries and chest, at Eisenhower Imaging Center.

Sensing Dr. Herman's genuine concern and sincerity, Diane agreed and before the end of the week she visited Eisenhower Imaging Center for the screening. The noninvasive procedure was performed on the Center's state-of-the-art Siemens Sonata MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) scanner and took only minutes. The resulting images were available immediately for Dr. Herman's review and evaluation. What they revealed was a dangerous aneurysm or stroke in Diane's brain. Stroke, as Dr. Herman explained, was a generic term for many conditions related to blood flow both into and within the brain. In Diane's case the aneurysm had stopped bleeding, but was likely to bleed again soon, and with far more serious consequences. As one might expect, the news stunned Diane and her husband Jeffrey. However, Dr. Herman calmed their fears when he explained that it could be repaired and he had experience conducting the delicate procedure right here at Eisenhower Medical Center. While Diane had been lucky, so far, the idea of surgery sent a cold chill down her spine. She began to recognize her good fortune to be in the care of Dr. Herman, one of an elite few in the country truly qualified to perform the latest procedure in the treatment of stroke and bleeding aneurysms known as Endovascular Coil Embolization.

[PHOTO dir="assets/news/story/coverstory2.jpg" align="center" width="350"]

Dr. Herman explained that the procedure involved running a small catheter from the groin area through the natural roadways of the body, the blood vessels, into the brain. Once there, he would locate the aneurysm, and fill it with tiny platinum coils to exclude it from the circulation – or block the blood flow to the aneurysm — which would reduce the risk of further bleeding and more serious health consequences for Diane. He added that it would be painless, and unlike craniotomies, which involve removing a portion of the skull to access the brain, and expose patients to greater risk of infection and involve extensive recovery time in the hospital, it would take just a few hours and only require a brief overnight stay for observation.

Diane entered Eisenhower Medical Center for the procedure on Monday. Once complete, she and her husband were relieved to hear from Dr. Herman that all had gone very well. The bleeding had been stopped. Diane remained at Eisenhower Medical Center until the next afternoon, and less than one week later, she and her husband flew back home to Connecticut.

Now, when Diane reflects on the experience she sees it as having been an odyssey — and truly a stroke of luck to have found herself in the competent care of the Eisenhower Medical Center Team. She gratefully reflects, "Eisenhower is truly a wonderful organization, and I will always be indebted to Dr. Herman. He saved my life, I'm sure."

Stroke: Time is of the Essence Stroke, or "Brain Attack," is the nation's number three killer (behind heart disease and cancer) and is the number one physical disabler in the world. The older you get, the more likely you are to suffer from stroke, but it can happen at any age. Even with the latest technology and skilled physicians available, slow recognition and action to the warning signs of stroke result in irreversible and devastating consequences every day. The sooner one responds, the better the chances for recovery. A stroke is an interruption of blood flow, where a clot or break in an artery or a vessel occurs in or around the brain. Crucial brain cells are denied blood, which contains vital oxygen and nutrients, and they begin to die within only a few minutes. Therefore, as with heart attacks, timing is critical for care and treatment of a stroke. Yet few people can name even a single sign or symptom, and more than half of all stroke victims delay seeking medical assistance for 24 hours or more. That delay can mean the difference in full recovery and a life of paralysis, blindness, slurred speech, major memory loss, and even death. Stroke symptoms: One-sided weakness, numbness, or paralysis Blurred or decreased vision Problems speaking or understanding Dizziness or loss of balance Sudden, severe or unexplained headache Temporary loss of function

If you or someone you know exhibits any of these symptoms, even if only temporarily, be safe – act immediately and call 911! MRI is the key to stroke detection and treatment Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) has been proven to be the most accurate form of diagnostic imaging to identify injury or problems with the vessels and arteries in the brain. Sophisticated MRIs, such as the systems available at Eisenhower, provide essential information for stroke diagnosis and care. The images give physicians information for rapid diagnosis and treatment, such as how much of the brain has been affected, and the precise location, to help determine appropriate treatment vital to minimize damage and maximize recovery. MRI uses powerful magnets, instead of radiation, to generate detailed images of structures and soft tissues within the body. The scanning process is quick and does not require sedation or anesthesia. Computer-generated images are available for review and evaluation immediately, making the MRI vital for early and fast stroke diagnoses.