

A message from Frank V. Sacco, FACHE, President and Chief Executive Officer

Good day,

Medical crises can strike anyone, even those who appear to be in excellent health. This patient was looking forward to competing in her next marathon when she found herself in the emergency room of Memorial Regional Hospital South.

She wrote to share her story and express tremendous thanks to Memorial – for helping her run the race of life once again.

Thank you,



Dear Mr. Sacco,

No one would have looked at me and seen a big sign over my head saying "POTENTIAL STROKE VICTIM HERE." I was 48 years old, a marathon runner and a scuba diver – the picture of good health. But one night driving home, I felt my left arm go numb. By the time I made it home, I had no feeling at all on my left side.

My husband took me to the emergency room at Memorial Regional Hospital South, where they ran many tests. When I told them I'd been scuba diving the day before, they transferred me to another hospital for hyperbaric therapy, in case I had decompression sickness. But after two treatments, the doctors knew it couldn't be dive-related, so they ran all my tests again.

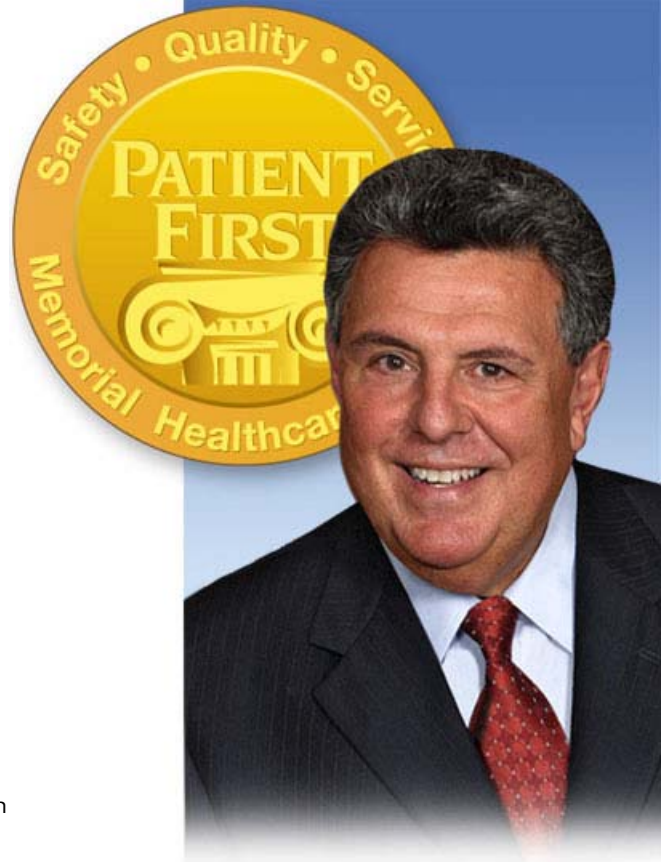
They told me stroke damage sometimes doesn't show up for 24 to 48 hours. Now, my MRI showed it plainly. I thought, "A stroke? This is ridiculous. I am going to walk again." I asked to be transferred back to Memorial Regional Hospital South, where I was admitted to the Rehabilitation Institute of South Florida.

I was determined to be out of the hospital in a week. I regained the use of my arm very quickly, but it took longer to learn how to walk again. It was as if someone had unplugged the cord that connected my brain to my legs – they just wouldn't move. My therapist would physically lift first one foot and place it down, then the other. Finally, the connection was made. My feet remembered. I went home, able to walk, in six days.

After I was discharged, three home-care therapists worked with me on pages of exercises that I followed as diligently as if I were preparing for a marathon. Every day, I practiced my facial movements in the mirror: E-E-E, O-O-O. I learned how to juggle. I did word puzzles. I ran on the treadmill, watching underwater videos and pledging I would one day dive again.

A follow-up angiogram showed two arteries had spontaneously torn in my neck. The good news was it wasn't related to blood pressure or heart disease. Another follow-up six months later showed one had healed and the other had cauterized itself, so I didn't need surgery, either.

Two years later, I'm scuba diving again, and I've run my first post-stroke marathon. I'm overwhelmed when I think about how far I've come. I couldn't have done it without the amazing support of my family, my friends and the team at the Rehabilitation Institute of South Florida. Thank you for giving me my life back.



Sincerely,

Joanie

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