



This site last updated on, Thursday, March 08, 2007.

News

Delivering hope

by Diane Vance /gate city staff writer
Thursday, March 8, 2007 3:00 PM CST
Two years and two months ago, a 54-year-old Keokuk woman in prime health had a stroke.

Margie Mitchell, a teacher at Central Lee, wife of the Rev. Bill Mitchell, who is pastor of First Christian Church in Keokuk, and mother of four, was bed-ridden for a few weeks in January 2005 and then got to work regaining use of her left arm.

This month, she is in a final push of intensive occupational therapy (OT) for three-weeks to re-wire the pathways to her brain and gain back use of her left arm, wrist and hand.

With the help of Molly Beauregard, a therapist at Keokuk Area Hospital, Mitchell has constructed a five-hour-a-day schedule of therapeutic exercises for three weeks.

A group of volunteers will coach and encourage her.

"I can tap the pool of my church family," she said. "I've also had neighbors and PEO sisters over to my house to help."

Starting this week, Beauregard and Mitchell set up two rooms at First Christian Church for Mitchell to practice using her left arm. They held a meeting Sunday night with volunteers to begin the new program, "Constraint Induced Movement Therapy," on Monday.

"I had 60 time slots to fill," said Mitchell.



Margie Mitchell (right) gets scissors positioned in her left hand to practice cutting a straight line on a piece of paper held by friend and volunteer "coach" Judy Worster. Mitchell, who had a stroke in January 2005, is undergoing intensive Constraint Induced Movement Therapy to regain use of her left arm.

That's 60 time slots for her pool of volunteers to sign-up for 30-minute periods at a time, five hours a day, for three weeks.

The stroke caused Mitchell's left leg some stiffness and her left arm to be limp. She started with six months of physical therapy at Keokuk Area Hospital and has been doing occupational therapy since.

Mitchell went to the clinic three times a week but couldn't get any wrist movement.

"We set up a home program for her," said Beauregard. "I knew she was really motivated. That motivated me to look into SAEBO flex exercises."

SAEBO, an acronym comprised of the names of the grandmothers of two women who invented the device, looks like a bionic hand and wrist. The device is slipped onto the hand that needs exercise and velcroed in place. Small coiled springs on the back of the fingers allow the hand to unclench, a problem Mitchell has had.

"Margie practiced with the SAEBO grip two hours a day," said Beauregard. "It helps with flexibility. She could grip things after six months on her own without the SAEBO. Her grip is coming back, but she's still working on letting go.

"Margie is also getting strength back in her shoulder and arm but not in her wrist. Electrical stimulation (a non-painful therapy) has helped."

Mitchell has full use of her right arm, hand, wrist and grip; it has never suffered any loss. She is back to driving and other daily activities. She does not foresee returning to work but she misses the classroom.

"I was a home ec. teacher, but I can't grip scissors or other things to demonstrate to my students," she said. "I also taught special education classes. I miss teaching. I have gone back to teaching first and second grade Sunday School classes and adult classes."

Now after all other options and insurance money have run out, Beauregard is delighted to set up the three weeks of intensive therapy.

"All this research shows we have the capacity and ability to impact the organization of our brains based on the types of activities we engage in," she said. "The size of the cortical representation of a body part depends on its amount of use."

Constraint Induced Movement Therapy uses the premise of teaching the brain new tricks. In the case of Mitchell, her "good" hand is constrained in a removable cast/splint for five hours a day. She is forced to use only her unresponsive arm, hand, wrist and fingers to do multiple exercises 30 minutes at a time. This promotes use of the weaker arm and helps overcome learned non-use.

In stroke victims, even if function is restored, a disconnect remains between function, movement and use. By constraining the strong arm, the brain is re-wired to learn to use the non-functioning arm. Improvement often can be seen in the course of two to three weeks.

Mitchell's exercises include pitching bean bags into a dishpan; playing catch with one of her volunteers using a bean bag and a cut-in-half plastic milk bottle; cutting on marked lines with scissors; lifting with a small weight and more. Also, there are activities using pinch and grip movements, she uses a stepper and walks while carrying an item, all the while not using her "good" right arm.

Beauregard came to First Christian Church Monday to walk each volunteer through the exercises. A schedule is posted on the wall. It is up to Mitchell and her volunteer supporters to carry them out.

"I'm really amazed how many volunteers are ready to help and get together here," said Beauregard. "I've never been able to get someone to do this outside of the clinic."

While resting at mid-day Monday, Mitchell said she had carried no risk factors for a stroke.

"I was healthy, I was active, I don't smoke, I'm not overweight," she said. "Nobody knows why it happened."

Her favorite activities included riding her bike outdoors and taking walks with her husband. Now, she has a recumbent bicycle and a treadmill and still takes walks with her husband.

"I've never seen someone progress so well after a deficit so big," said Beauregard. "She's always had a lot of hope."

Mitchell is ready to work and grateful for her supporting volunteers and helpful neighbors. She keeps track of her own progress and remarks if she is satisfied with a specific motion or task.

"Her friends are very proud of her," said PEO sister Judy Worster who came Monday afternoon as a volunteer/coach.

[Print this story](#) | [Email this story](#) | [Return to News](#)