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SBELIH Nurse Saved Coworker's Life While Both On Duty

Nicole Wagner | June 10, 2025



Stony Brook Eastern Long Island Hospital emergency department Dr. Ryan Zapata, left, and detox unit nurse Krystal David, right, helped administer life-saving care to nurse Brittney Berry, second right, when she had a stroke in March. Pictured with Ms. Berry's mom Michelle Smith, second left. (Credit: Nicole Wagner)

A nurse's quick response to her coworker's signs of stroke saved her life at Stony Brook Eastern Long Island Hospital earlier this year.

Krystal David, a nurse in SBELIH's detox unit, took her training to the next level in March when her coworker, nurse Brittney Berry, started showing signs of stroke. Ms. David noticed Ms. Berry was abnormally lethargic before her face started to droop.

She immediately called a stroke code and brought Ms. Berry to a private room. Emergency department Dr. Ryan Zapata administered Ms. Berry tenecteplase, a medication that is used to treat strokes caused by blood clots, to dissolve the clot. Thanks to the swift and coordinated action by the medical team at SBELIH, Ms. Berry made a full recovery.

It is important to administer the drug within four hours of stroke symptoms, Dr. Zapata said.

"The sooner you break up the clot and restore blood flow to the affected body part, the faster the recovery is and the less damage you will incur," he said.

The lifesaving efforts by the medical team at SBELIH are something Ms. Berry and her mother Michelle Smith, also a nurse at the hospital, expressed their gratitude for at the first Life Saver Award and Krystal Clear Award ceremony June 4.

"I wasn't even a patient," Ms. Berry said. She was 35 at the time of her stroke; according to the Mayo Clinic, people who are 55 years and older have an increased risk of stroke than younger people, but strokes can happen at any age. "I shouldn't have even been on Krystal's radar."

Ms. Smith never imagined she would experience the lifesaving care her fellow SBELIH staff provide in "such a personal and profound way" before her daughter's stroke earlier this year.

That lifesaving training that hospital employees at SBELIH like Ms. David receive, is something the hospital is working to be recognized for as administrators apply to become a primary stroke center.

The application will be submitted to the joint commission of hospital accreditation at the end of June for review before the hospital's procedures and processes are reviewed in person. Once an approval is granted by the joint commission, the state's health department will designate the hospital as a primary stroke center — meaning that emergency medical services would bring stroke patients into its emergency department.

"Knowing that Stony Brook Eastern Long Island Hospital is committed to making stroke care more accessible and effective for our community is both reassuring and inspiring," Ms. Smith said. "Our personal experience is a testament to the dedication, hard work and compassionate care this hospital provides every day."

Twenty-six people across the hospital's emergency department, radiology department, behavioral health unit, business office, laboratory and pharmacy were honored with a Life Saver Award, including Ms. David and Dr. Zapata.



David Agbara, Suzan Bignami, Deborah Bondarchuck, Dr. Abida Butler, Cory Carberry, Darcy Demirciyan, Karen Gatz, Russell Guerrier, Treya Leake, Christina Mantzopolous, Amanda Minessali, Mumta Ram, Kathleen Hauser, Richard Perrone, Stacey Huggins, Christine Katz, Kelly Kalman, Alexander Kamp, Jalessa Monroe, Porschia Poteet, Dawn Raynor-Green, Cody Fisher, Sydney Evans and Charles Breitstadt were all recognized with Life Saver Awards for the instrumental roles they played in Ms. Berry's treatment and recovery.

“It really is a team effort when we save lives,” senior vice president of patient care Suzie Marriott said at the award ceremony.

The Krystal Clear Award will continue to be given out each year to recognize hospital employees who demonstrate “Krystal clear” thinking while saving lives.

“This serves as a motivation to continue the work and care employees have,” Ms. David said of the award.

Community members can be vigilant to notice stroke symptoms by remembering the acronym BE FAST: Balance, Eyes, Face, Arm, Speech and Time. By staying alert to any loss of balance, blurred vision, facial drooping, arm or leg weakness, slurred speech and acting fast, thus saving time, community members can help save a life themselves.

For more information about SBELIH, visit elih.stonybrookmedicine.edu.