

Ashley Link of Lakeland Regional Medical Center

by Dawn Ortiz

“Real Life Stories. Really Amazing Care.” An ER campaign based on true stories, including that of an employee who became a stroke patient at age 30...



Millions of people in the U.S. are affected by stroke, but at 30 years old, Ashley Link, PR and Marketing Supervisor at Lakeland Regional Medical Center (LRMC) in Florida, had no reason to think she would be one of them. A nonsmoking vegetarian who exercises regularly, Ashley had no apparent risk factors for stroke. Little did she know that on January 24, 2010 she would come to depend on the care provided by the area’s most advanced Primary Stroke Center, located at LRMC.

Here’s her story:

Any other night of the week, Ashley would have been asleep by 10:30, but on January 24, 2010, she was, thankfully, awake. She and her husband had stayed up to play with their toddler after returning from their first trip away from him. Ashley was standing in the bathroom when she felt lightheaded and noticed that her right arm was involuntarily moving. She tried to hold it down with her left arm, but when she let go, the right arm continued to move on its own.

She shouted for her husband. When he asked what was wrong and she tried unsuccessfully to answer, they both realized she had lost most of her ability to speak.

Her husband called 911, and the paramedics arrived within 5 minutes. After asking her some questions, they determined she had a stroke. They called in a “stroke alert” to LRMC and took her to the ER. The stroke center was prepared for her arrival, and she was seen immediately and began receiving treatment—all within 30 minutes of the onset of symptoms.

After a battery of tests, doctors determined that Ashley had an opening in the upper chambers of her heart. Although uncommon, in rare circumstances, this opening can allow a blood clot to travel to the brain, causing a stroke, as it did in Ashley’s case. Doctors were able to insert an implant to cover the hole in Ashley’s heart, and since then, she has made a full recovery. As soon as Ashley first heard the word “stroke,” she was grateful to have access to her hometown hospital where stroke patients are seen with no wait time and where the entire continuum of care is excellent.

I spoke with Ashley recently about her story and LRMC’s ER campaign, “Real Life Stories. Really Amazing Care.”

Ashley, why did LRMC initiate an ER campaign?

LRMC is home to the busiest ER in the state with more than 150,000 visits a year as of 2009. We’ve had wonderful patient satisfaction reports so we know patients are satisfied. But there are a few people who reported concerns about our ER wait times to local media outlets and posted about it on social media. This very small percentage of patients voicing dissatisfaction was somewhat damaging to our ER’s reputation.

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We wanted to run an ER campaign to let people know about real life patients who have had tremendous experiences at our hospital. We wanted people to realize that there is no wait time for those facing life-threatening circumstances.

We also wanted community members to understand that what may seem like a minor ailment could actually evolve into a major emergency situation and to feel confident in and proud of the care they will receive should they need our ER.

How did you construct the campaign?

We gathered patients who had experienced our ER firsthand and who were willing to share their amazing stories and tremendous outcomes. And, there was my story, which was meant in part to educate our audiences about the fact that stroke can happen to anyone.

Another patient story was that of a gentleman whose heart stopped 3 times— once for 7 minutes—who was brought back to life by our medical team in the ER. His phenomenal story is on our website.

Also on the website, you'll find the story of a 2 year old who was brought to our ER after suffering an allergic reaction, which is very frightening for parents and young children. Our pediatric ER, the only one in the area, was able to treat her successfully. Our pediatric ER doctors and nurses are trained to treat children specifically.

These stories detailed the ER care each of these patients received. We promoted them with ads in our local newspaper, The Ledger and an additional paper, The Polk County Democrat. We developed videos about these stories and uploaded them to our website and YouTube. We featured the stories on SoundCare, our on on-hold messaging system, so callers would be able to learn from the experiences of others while they waited to speak to someone. We also created direct mail pieces featuring each patient's story. Each piece was sent to 30,000 people. An additional 20,000 seniors and newcomers were exposed to the stories through our newsletter.

We saw a 58% increase in our ER web page views. The ad placement in the newspaper raised awareness with 1,161,075 impressions, with the pass-along rate creating a potential 2,322,150 impressions, a huge educational opportunity for us. As this was our first time using Facebook in an ad campaign, we created conversations, and we generated 42 likes, 56 comments and 5 reposts. Our YouTube posting generated tons of impressions. So we consider the campaign very successful.

Readers can visit our website, www.lrmc.com, to view the video interviews and read all three patient stories.

Many thanks to Ashley for sharing her story with us. As you can see from the results of LRM's ER campaign, stories are a great way communicate, because they grab and hold the attention of your audience. In addition, choosing the right communications tools to deliver your message can make all the difference.

A Vericom client since 2007, LRM encompasses the widest range of services of any hospital in the Lakeland, Florida area.