

“They really are the most wonderful people at Rush. I couldn’t ask for more.”

-Wanda Williams-Harrell, an aneurysm patient at Rush



Life-Saving Measures for Patient in Financial Need

Last year, Wanda Williams-Harrell had the mother of all headaches — a headache that hurt so overwhelmingly that no over-the-counter pain reliever would help. “I felt like my head was about to explode from my body,” Wanda says. And then she experienced a strange spasm in the nape of her neck.

Wanda told her husband to call 9-1-1.

A health care worker and nursing student, Wanda knew this was no ordinary headache; this was no migraine.

A Life Line

That call and what happened afterward may have saved Wanda’s life. Paramedics brought Wanda to an emergency room that participates in Rush University Medical Center’s 942-BRAIN initiative. This program allows emergency room personnel to speak directly to neurological stroke specialists at Rush any time of day or evening. They discuss the patient’s condition and, together, determine if the patient requires specialized neurological care offered at Rush.

For Wanda, doctors made the decision to transfer her immediately to Rush. They suspected an aneurysm, a blood-filled sack, had ruptured in Wanda brain.

“This condition is fatal in 50 percent of cases,” says Roham Moftakhar, MD, a neuroendovascular surgeon at Rush. “For Wanda, time was critical; we needed to act quickly.”

Accessing the Brain

Once at Rush, staff performed an angiogram to confirm their suspicions and locate the source of Wanda’s excruciating pain: an aneurysm had indeed burst deep inside Wanda’s brain. To stop the bleeding in her brain and prevent further damage, Moftakhar and his

colleague Demetrius Lopes, MD, opted to perform a minimally invasive endovascular procedure that would enable them to access the far reaches of Wanda’s brain. By threading a catheter through Wanda’s blood vessels to her brain, doctors could insert a stent to reinforce the leaky arteries damaged by the aneurysm and restore normal blood flow. They also inserted a Slinky-like coil in her brain to keep the aneurysm from erupting again.

No Insurance: Now What?

It took several days before Wanda fully realized what had happened. She was weak but incredibly grateful to her health care team.

Wanda also became extremely worried. After working 14 years for the city as a public health worker, she had recently been laid off. Her husband, Nathaniel, had just started a new job. So like many Americans in 2013, Wanda did not have health insurance. How would she pay for her care?

The answer: charity care. Rush provides free or discounted care for qualifying patients facing significant financial hardship.

Staff connected Wanda and her husband to a financial counselor at Rush who told them about the program and asked them to fill out the appropriate paperwork. The end result: Rush waived the costs of not only her initial treatments but follow-up care as well.

This support proved invaluable to Wanda because, as it turned out, the aneurysm that erupted wasn’t her only problem.

Wanda had multiple aneurysms, a condition she may have been born with. So she underwent a second procedure to prevent another aneurysm from erupting. And to help ensure a smaller, less problematic aneurysm doesn’t become a threat down the line, Wanda sees Moftakhar and his team for follow-up visits and tests.

And that’s just fine with Wanda, who is doing extremely well after her ordeal, according to Moftakhar. She has become one of his team’s number one fans. “They really are the most wonderful people at Rush. I couldn’t ask for more.”