

# Sharing strokes of insight and recovery

'I wasn't aware that the left side of my body was dead', ray mcdonald

BY MARELLE REID, BURNABY NOW JUNE 7, 2013



Life after stroke: Ray McDonald, a Burnaby resident, will be sharing his story during a special event this weekend in Vancouver.

**Photograph by:** Larry Wright, BURNABY NOW

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In February 2011, Burnaby resident Ray McDonald woke up one morning with what he assumed was a severe migraine. He spent the next two days in bed and it wasn't until he woke up in hospital after a brain operation that he was told he had suffered a stroke.

"It kind of came out of the blue," he said of the hemorrhage in the right side of his brain that caused loss of motor skills on his left side and some vision loss in both eyes.

"I wasn't aware that the left side of my body was dead," he said. "I couldn't get out of bed and I didn't know why but I wasn't terribly perturbed about it, which was strange. Now, looking back at it, that was all part of the effect (of having a stroke)."

McDonald was 63 at the time and was in good health, with no blood pressure or weight issues that might indicate a predisposition for stroke.

After a month in hospital, he was transferred to a rehabilitation centre where he started another month of cognitive and physical rehabilitation therapy. After returning home, the journey back to health was a slow but steady progress that continues to this day. McDonald has regained his ability to walk and most

of the feeling in his left side, but still has some problems with vision and balance.

Part of his continuing journey back to health includes volunteering with other stroke patients and giving talks on post-stroke rehabilitation.

On Saturday, June 8, McDonald will share his story during the stroke recovery education day hosted by the Stroke Recovery Association of B.C. at the Vancouver Public Library, where participants will learn tips and strategies for making life at home easier, ways to prevent another stroke, and ways to find support and programs in the community.

"The questions (my wife and I) get from people, you can tell how much it means to them to hear (our story) and to be able to talk to someone who's been through it," he said.

Every year in B.C. about 6,500 people suffer a stroke, which can sometimes occur without warning, and can strike at any age, though the majority of stroke victims are over the age of 65, according to the Stroke Recovery Association of B.C.

Tim Readman, executive director of the association, said the education event is important for stroke victims to know there is support available in their communities and that having a stroke doesn't have to mean an end to independence or quality of life.

"There is life after stroke," he said. "What we mean by that is that there is hope. We define the recovery process by saying there is continuous opportunity for improvement. Before we knew a lot about the human brain we thought that if it was damaged it was damaged forever. Now we have a concept which is known as neu-roplasticity, and in popular language that's become the brain that heals itself."

Readman said physical and mental therapies, social and recreation opportunities, emotional support and education and awareness around stroke recovery, in combination, all leads to the best outcome for stroke patients in the long-term.

How to access these and other elements of recovery support will be presented at the education event, to be held from 10: 30 a.m. to 2: 30 p.m. at the Vancouver Public Library's central branch, at 350 West Georgia St. in Vancouver.

Anyone affected by stroke or interested in gaining more information is welcome to attend this free event.

For more information, visit [www.stroke-recoverybc.ca](http://www.stroke-recoverybc.ca).