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Photo by David Seawell

When I got a rapid-onset headache and nausea that would not break, Telehealth Ontario advised me to go to the emergency department (ED).

I was checked in and got an intravenous insert right away. I got moved to a waiting area, then to the CT scanner. I remember consenting to have the contrast dye and then being ushered back to my little pod in the ED. I eventually saw an ED doctor, had an MRI, saw an internist and then a neurologist. They were all nice, but they didn't tell me much. It was only after I had been there for several hours that either the neurologist or the internist told me I had had a hemorrhagic stroke. As a healthy woman in her mid-40s, I was stunned.

My nurse told me my neurosurgeon was one of the best in Ontario. I saw him at 7 pm the next day on the ward. He looked exhausted and seemed annoyed to be there. He told me that I could have died. I didn't know what I was supposed to say or do. Should I cry? Should I be

joyful? I had so many questions, but any reaction I had in that moment seemed stupid. I felt like a child speaking to an authority figure, not a patient to a doctor.

He told me to avoid all high-intensity exercise, which felt devastating because I had a community of people that I worked out with 5 days a week.

In my view, health care is very process oriented. My experience has been little blips of intense contact with people — 30 seconds here, 30 seconds there. When I was going through all this, I felt like I shouldn't take up too much space, shouldn't be too demanding, shouldn't ask too many questions... because half a minute is all we can give you right now. But is that what you need when there is something really wrong with you?

I think there needs to be a place in the system for unhurried care. What I mean is time for speaking to patients face to face, to explain what is happening and make space to safely ask questions. I know that not everybody has the time to do this, but, in my experience, this kept getting pushed to the next person who seemed to have less time than the first. It doesn't have to be everybody's job, but it shouldn't be nobody's job either.

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