

# The **ANGELS** Journey

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ISSUE 3 | SEPTEMBER 2025

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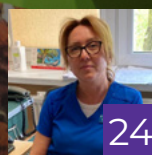


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100 REGIONS | DECEMBER 2027

## Be the Inspiration

# Welcome

to the September edition of the Angels Journey 2025.



“

**The ones who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do.**

”

There's a quiet power in the words we speak and the actions we take. Often, we don't know who's listening. We don't know who's watching. And we rarely know what impact we've made – until much later, if ever.

But sometimes, the ripple becomes a wave.

Dr Nune Yeghiazaryan remembers the moment her perspective shifted. It wasn't a grand lecture or a formal training. It was a challenge, posed by Dr Mikael Skon Muratoglu. "How dare you not dream?" he asked. "If not now, then when? If not you, then who?"

These weren't just rhetorical questions. They were a call to action. And Nune answered. Today, she's helping reshape stroke care in Armenia, because someone dared her to believe in the impossible.

Dr Francesca Romana Pezzella found her path illuminated by

the kind of leadership that lifts others. "Valeria Caso gave me many opportunities," she says. And in those opportunities, Francesca Romana found her voice, her purpose, and her own way to lead.

Prof. Harriet Proios lives by the Japanese concept of *ichigo ichie* – the idea that every moment is unique and unrepeatable. Her story reminds us that sometimes the most profound inspiration comes from simply being present and treating each encounter as sacred.

Dr Sharania Moodley was a registrar when she first felt the spark. Inspired by mentors like Professors Ahmed Iqbal Bhigjee and Vinod Patel, and indirectly by pioneers

like Dr Louis Kroon and Asst. Prof. Deanna Saylor, she chose to carry the torch forward. Their work lit a path – and she walked it.

Dr Iwona Sinkiewicz didn't set out to inspire a region. She simply did the work, with passion and persistence. But her actions spoke louder than any speech. Today, her region in Poland stands united as an Angels Region – because one person believed, and others followed.

Finally, there's Diana Jiménez, a nurse who gave everything to her team, and when she needed them most, they gave it back. Her life was saved by the very people she had inspired through her dedication. The circle of impact was complete.

# The Angels Initiative

The Angels Initiative is a healthcare intervention dedicated to improving stroke patients' chances of survival and a disability-free life. Since 2016, an estimated 16 million patients have been treated in over 8,000 Angels hospitals worldwide, including more than 1,400 new stroke-ready hospitals established across the world with the help of Angels.

Find out more by visiting [angels-initiative.com](https://angels-initiative.com)

These stories are not isolated. They are threads in a tapestry of transformation. They show us that inspiration is not always loud. It's not always planned. Sometimes it even comes in the form of a postcard. But it is always powerful.

So, here's the truth: **you never know who you're inspiring.** You never know how far your words will travel, or how deeply your actions will resonate. But you can choose to be the kind of person who inspires anyway.

Because someone is listening. Someone is watching. And someone is waiting for a reason to believe that change is possible.

#### Be the inspiration.

You may never know the full impact—but the world will.



Jan van der Merwe  
Co-Founder & Project Lead  
– The Angels Initiative

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From Spain

# You've got mail



The Andalusian Nurses Steering Committee (GENVA).

The distance between Helsinki and the south of Spain is over 4,000 km, but for these Andalusian nurses, a postcard sent from ESOC reduced it to nothing at all.

ON an early summer's afternoon in Seville, Raimundo Caro checked his mailbox and was surprised to find a postcard. "This was something I wasn't expecting," he says. "But when I turned it over to see where it came from, who had sent it, and what they had written on it, I was overcome with emotion from all the joy this little postcard brought me."



The postcards began their journey in a red post box on the Angels booth at ESOC 2025 in Helsinki.



*Heroes Road to Region Status*

Come aboard for a journey to Angels Region status that ascends along the twists and turns of the mountain roads in Catalunya where this story takes place.

"The journey begins at Barn on June 13 when Maria and Paco set off from Lleida on a road trip that will take in the towns of Tremp and La Seu d'Urgell. All in all, they will spend four hours and thirty-six minutes in the car."



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All 12 stroke units in Anadalusia are represented in the group, which means **their influence is felt throughout the region.**

”

The postcard carried the signatures of stroke nurses Joaquín García, Sergio González, Marta Ángel, Juan Manuel López, and two members of the Angels team in Spain – Susana Granados and team leader Alicia Arjona. It had been popped into a red post box on the Angels booth at ESOC 2025 in Helsinki, and from there found its way to the south of Spain.

At around the same time, postcards landed in the mailbox of Paloma Caro in Málaga, and on the desk of Aida Gómez.

All the postcards carried QR codes that linked the recipients to a story about Spain on the Angels website. The QR code on Raimundo's postcard took him to the story of Almería, which late in 2024 became the first Angels Region in Europe. He says, "I knew the story behind the Hospital of Torrecárdenas firsthand, where quality monitoring was lead by Joaquín. But the involvement of all the hospitals in the region, together with the EMS, and the implementation of the

FAST Heroes campaign in so many schools to spread the importance of early detection in stroke, I think it's an amazing story."

The nurses at both ends of the postcard exchange are all members of the Andalusian Nurses Steering Committee (GENVA) that was formed in 2022 with the goal of standardizing stroke nursing care in the region, and which has in addition become an influential platform for knowledge and experience sharing. All 12 stroke units in Anadalusia are represented in the group, which means their influence is felt throughout the region – but it also impacts practice in their own hospitals. All four GENVA nurses who'd traveled to Helsinki were there to collect double diamond awards on behalf of their hospitals. Three GENVA nurses – Joaquín, Raimundo and Sergio – are also past nominees for the ESO Angels Spirit of Excellence Award, which honors individuals who embody excellence in stroke care.



Raimundo was nominated in 2023 in recognition of his role as an advocate of scientific research in neurovascular nursing care, and as founder of the stroke unit at Hospital Universitario Virgen Del Rocío in Seville, and of the Spanish Society of Neurological Nursing (SEDENE). He is now retired but participates in GENVA activities as an 'emeritus' member.

Sergio was also a 2023 nominee together with his colleagues Almudena Fernández and Álvaro López at the Regional University Hospital of Málaga where they'd developed [Proyecto Flecha](#), a visual "checklist" that standardizes post-acute care in the stroke unit. And in 2024, [Joaquín García](#), chief nurse in the stroke unit at Almería's University Hospital Torrecárdenas, became only the second nurse in Europe to receive the Spirit of Excellence Award in recognition of his leadership in standardizing stroke nursing care and his advocacy for quality monitoring. Joaquín is part of the GENVA leadership structure, together with Sergio, Paloma Caro, and Lidia Ruiz of Hospital Virgen de Macarena in Seville.

We had some questions for the GENVA nurses – both those who attended ESOC, and for their colleagues who later found postcards in the mail.

**JOAQUÍN GARCÍA,  
HOSPITAL TORRECÁRDENAS,  
ALMERÍA**

**What did you enjoy most about ESOC 2025?**

Without a doubt, the best was getting to see my colleagues and enjoy the congress together.

**How important is a unified, cooperative structure like GENVA for speeding up change?**

It's not just important but essential. It's the base where we can build and secure knowledge, and share experiences.

**After three years, has GENVA met or exceeded its goals?**

We have already accomplished so much, but honestly, this is only the beginning. A very important beginning, indeed, but there is still a lot to do, and I am sure we can achieve everything we set out to do!

**JUAN MANUEL LÓPEZ,  
HOSPITAL VIRGEN DE LAS  
NIEVES, GRANADA**

**What are the stand-out things you learnt at this year's ESOC?**

It was an amazing experience. You get to see all the technological advances, the most innovative

research works, get to know very interesting people and network with them... And the best is we bring home all these new possibilities to our stroke units.

**Honoring your colleagues by sharing a postcard from Helsinki was such a good idea. How did it come about?**

Susana showed us the postcards and told us we could send them to anyone we want. We were definitely missing some of our GENVA members there, so we thought it would be great to remind them how much we would have liked to share the experience with them as well.

**How has GENVA impacted stroke care improvement at your hospital?**

GENVA was a before and after for us at the hospital, a turning point. Being part of it means we can share knowledge, concerns, questions, protocols, projects, and support each other through good and rough times.



From left, Sergio González, Juan Manuel López, Joaquín García, Susana Granados and Marta Ángel at ESOC.



From left, Sergio González, Juan Manuel López, Joaquín García and Marta Ángel at ESOC.

### **MARTA ÁNGEL, HOSPITAL VIRGEN DEL ROCÍO, SEVILLE**

#### **What is your stand-out moment from ESOC 2025?**

Definitely the ESO Angels Awards ceremony. Not just receiving the recognition but also getting on stage with my colleagues while watching on the screen all the Spanish hospitals that had been awarded double diamonds, was truly an unforgettable moment.

#### **Which story did your group select to send to your colleagues back in Andalusia?**

The story of Almería, of course. The achievement of Almería becoming the first Angels region in Europe is a huge honor for us.

#### **How does being part of GENVA impact your work at your hospital?**

It's an opportunity to motivate and encourage my teammates, not only by spreading the word about the projects we are working on, but also by letting them know about the amazing group of nurses who are fighting together for a common goal, which is to improve stroke care.

### **SERGIO GONZÁLEZ, HOSPITAL REGIONAL DE MÁLAGA**

#### **What was your goal in sending a postcard to your fellow GENVA members?**

We could not stop thinking about our colleagues who'd been there in previous years, but couldn't this year, because they'd changed departments, retired, or had to decline the invitation for personal reasons. GENVA is more than a

working group. The friendships, the support for each other and the good atmosphere we have created, make GENVA a unique group, and that is why it is growing so strongly.

#### **After three years, what is the impact of GENVA on stroke care in Andalusia?**

Nurses from stroke units in Andalusia are united and working together. Thanks to this, we are part of the Andalusian Stroke Plan, the program which organizes and leads all new initiatives in stroke care in our community. Any patient who enters an Andalusian stroke unit will receive the same nursing stroke care protocols, based on the latest scientific evidence. We are also leading some multicentric research projects to try to give GENVA a wider visibility in the health and scientific community.

#### **What was your highlight of ESOC 2025?**

Being part of a scientific event like this one and being exposed to multiple studies and new possibilities. I feel blessed to keep learning and sharing in this environment.

“

It is a reality that many stroke units around the world are now sharing this protocol which was born in Málaga, Andalusia.

”



**RAIMUNDO CARO,**  
HOSPITAL UNIVERSITARIO  
VIRGEN DEL ROCÍO (RETIRED)

**You received a postcard from ESOC! Who sent it to you and what did they write on it?**

It was sent by my GENVA colleagues who were at ESOC, Marta, Joaquín, Juanma, and Sergio, as well as Ana Raquel from Tenerife, and our Angels, Alicia and Susana. It said that they miss me and that they always remember me as a reference in stroke care.

**What would you say are GENVA's main accomplishments to date?**

The main accomplishments may be the standardization of stroke care in all stroke units when it comes to nursing protocols, together with the implementation of the Arrow Project, not only in Spain, but internationally. It is a reality that

“  
I would also **send a postcard to all those hospitals** who don't yet belong to the Angels community.”

many stroke units around the world are now sharing this protocol which was born in Málaga, Andalusia.

**Who would you send an Angels postcard to if you could?**

I would send a postcard to all the GENVA members, to thank them for helping me achieve everything I fought for, in 38 years of working in neurology. In the beginning, the idea that all the stroke units in Andalucía would share the same stroke care, was unimaginable. I would also send a postcard to all those hospitals who don't yet belong to the Angels community to make them aware of everything we are achieving together, improving treatment and stroke care around the world.

**AIDA GÓMEZ,**  
HOSPITAL UNIVERSITARIO  
VIRGEN DE LA VICTORIA  
(MÁLAGA)

**You received a postcard from ESOC! Who sent it to you?**

My GENVA colleagues sent me the postcard, Marta, Joaquín, Juanma, and Sergio, and my favorite Angels, Alicia and Susanita.

**What was your first reaction when you recognized what it was?**

I was really really happy to see that my colleagues were thinking about me during ESOC, as much as I was thinking about them.



Aida Gómez

**The GENVA group of nurses are really making an impact on stroke care in Andalusia. What would you say are its main accomplishments?**

I would say the biggest so far is being part of the Andalusian Stroke Plan. This is a very important recognition for us. Besides that, that we have formed a very amazing and solid working group which I really admire.

**If you could send an Angels postcard to anyone in the stroke community, who would it be?**

Our colleague Yolanda Rodríguez from the Hospital Virgen de las Nieves in Granada. She is a very important part of the group, someone we all admire deeply.



Raimundo Caro





# Showing up for stroke



Dr Francesca Romana Pezzella, new chair of the SAP-E, is building her legacy out of concrete actions delivered with compassion. She says (and the stroke community agrees): “I’m the kind of person who doesn’t step back.”

IN September 2024, a minivan carrying an impressive roster of stroke experts crossed the border from Poland into Ukraine. From there it continued to Lviv, the largest city in western Ukraine, where they would meet up with members of the Ukraine stroke community.

Despite its distance from the front, a wave of Russian drones and hypersonic missiles had recently struck the city's historic center. Francesca Romana Pezzella, the Italian neurologist who was leading the expedition, felt responsible for everyone in the vehicle – Hanne Christensen from Denmark, Björn Logi Thorarinsson from Iceland, Natan Bornstein from Israel, Alessandro Bufi from Perugia, Italy, and Francesca's mentor and a past ESO president, Valeria Caso.

“

It wasn't science but the **human spirit** that provided the fuel for this **ride into the danger zone.**

”

“If something happened, I would be responsible and liable,” she recalls during a rare break at ESOC in Helsinki where she has just been introduced as the new chair of



The minivan occupants are, from left, Valeria Caso, Alessandro Bufi, Hanne Christensen, Francesca Romana, Björn Logi Thorarinsson, and Nathan Bornstein.



At ESOC 2025 in Helsinki, with Angels global project lead Jan van der Merwe, team leader Mateusz Stolarczyk and Ukrainian consultant, Lev Prystupniuk.

the Stroke Action Plan for Europe (SAP-E).

As a precaution she'd registered their itinerary on an Italian website that would activate an emergency response in a crisis. She also downloaded an air raid warning app and mapped out several exit routes in case the situation called for a hasty retreat.

“

We had to keep the community **together**, let them know **they were not alone**.

”

It wasn't science but the human spirit that provided the fuel for this ride into the danger zone. In the third year of an unimaginable war, they met the moment by doing the one thing that couldn't be delivered via a video screen.

“It was a question of being present,” Francesca Romana says.

Their gallant gesture struck the right chord, but the truth was Francesca Romana and her fellow travelers had been showing up

for Ukraine ever since the Russian invasion of February 2022 started the deadliest war in Europe since World War II.

Her first reaction to news of the invasion had been disbelief, Francesca Romana says. “I'd been there in December and was due to go there in February, but all travel and activities were immediately cancelled. We thought it couldn't be true.”

Discussions within the ESO posed the question, what should a scientific society do? The answer was a task force to address the needs of the Ukrainian stroke community that Francesca, who by her own assessment has the makings of an activist, was tapped to lead.

They realized their Ukrainian colleagues were in shock, she says. Urgent needs were met with urgent responses, such as Prof. Giancarlo Graziani of San Filippo Neri Hospital opening the doors of his rehabilitation unit to a Ukrainian stroke survivor, and others opening their homes. Francesca Romana offered comfort and connection in early morning phone calls from Rome where she is the senior neurologist at San Camillo Forlanini Hospital. She says, “We had to keep the community together, let them know they were not alone.”

Soon there was a series of education seminars for stroke physicians, supported by the steadfast Angels

team in Ukraine. Participation grew as doctors from all over the country logged in for experience-sharing and a sense of community. During blackouts in occupied cities, doctors connected with their mobile phones inside darkened corridors.

These seminars offered them a chance to grow and learn from the best minds in the world. Dr Michael Mazya from Sweden's Karolinska Institute spoke about intravenous thrombolysis in acute ischemic stroke. Prof. Peter Kelly dialed in from Dublin to speak about secondary prevention after stroke. Prof. Urs Fischer, head of neurology at University Hospital



Oslo University, 2023. TF4UKR co-chair Prof. Yuri Flomin and Norway's Prof. Else Sandset.



“

**She is someone you can count on** wherever compassion meets action.

”

Basel, Switzerland, spoke about anticoagulation after stroke...

“We gave them the best,” Francesca Romana says.

Heedful of their Ukrainian colleagues’ evolving needs, the TF4UKR coordinates with the World Health Organization and other European institutes to provide joint support, and in September 2024, with the aid of a grant from Oslo University, joined hands with the Ukrainian Stroke Medicine Society to organize a stroke conference in Lviv.

Among the participants at the conference were six distinguished stroke neurologists who had all arrived via Poland in a minivan.

## IT'S PERSONAL

Showing up for Ukraine by being emotionally and physically present fits a larger pattern of engagement with the world of stroke. Francesca Romana is a founding member of ESO-EAST (a program to address stroke care disparities in Eastern Europe), and one of the architects of the Stroke Action Plan for Europe (SAP-E), an ambitious pan-European initiative that sets targets for the development of stroke care by 2030. Firmly rooted in public health, the commitment to equal and universal healthcare access that underpins projects like ESO-EAST and SAP-E is exactly in line with her vision for how the world should be. She is someone you can count on wherever compassion meets action. In her own words, “I’m the kind of person who doesn’t step back.”

Francesca Romana has made a conscious effort to discover and develop the kind of person she is. “I have been working on myself for a long time,” is how she puts it. At medical school she was briefly torn between neurology and



If you want to change the world, ask a busy woman. From left, Valeria Caso, Hanne Christensen, Francesca Romana and Simona Sacco.



Francesca Romana's presentation at WSC 2023 in Toronto.

psychology. She chose neurology for the human contact but remained sufficiently interested in the social aspect of the mind's functioning to take courses in behavioral science and later started a personal path with psychoanalysis. “It was a safe environment to express myself,” she says. “It was where I learnt to be the authentic version of me.”

She knows, for example, that she excels under pressure, so it's no mystery why she has always worked in acute stroke, or why she likes being in the ER.

She also knows that she is not by nature a soloist. “I like orchestras,” she says, “I am comfortable in orchestras.” She grew up in the scouts and as a teenager sang in a choir, learning to love not only the harmony but the value of collaboration: “When you sing in a choir, you know when it is your turn to sing.”

She enjoys the collaborative culture within the SAP-E. Newly elevated to its chair, she insists: “It's not chair, it is a sofa with lots of committed people on it.”



She is herself the beneficiary of the kind of leadership that makes room for others: “Valeria [Caso] has given my many opportunities. So, the vision is of a sofa.”

SAP-E is the most extensive policy project on stroke ever undertaken in Europe. When Francesca Romana picked up the baton from Hanne Christensen at ESOC 2025, the program had just past the halfway mark and the score at the end of the first half exceeded expectations. Forty-seven out of 49 targeted countries had already aligned themselves with the program, and although the Declaration for Action on Stroke had as yet been signed by the health ministers of just 14 countries, national stroke plans were taking shape in many more. Shortly to make it 15 was Italy, where the Stroke Action Plan for Italy, helmed by ISA-All president Paola Santalucia, was presented to the senate in April.

Until Aleš Tomek became co-chair of SAP-E in May, policy programs for stroke care looked a lot like women’s

work, with the top leadership positions filled by purposeful women such as action plan past chair Hanne Christensen and co-chair Arlene Wilkie, new ESO-EAST steering committee chair Cristina Tiu, and Francesca Romana herself. Could it be a case of, if you want something done, ask a busy woman?

“

I would like my legacy to be something concrete.

”

She is a busy woman who enjoys a lot of support from her family, Francesca Romana says. She is married with two daughters aged

20 and 16 of whom she is immensely proud. Whether she is travelling or working night shift at her hospital, “they make my life easy at home”. It goes without saying that they are very proud of her too.

In a balancing act familiar to busy women, Francesca Romana makes a point of being present in her family life while also showing up for stroke – and for young healthcare professionals in Italy and elsewhere in Europe who may need someone in their corner. She wants them to know they can reach out to her at any time and receive concrete help. And then they must pay it forward by helping someone else.

“I would like my legacy to be something concrete,” she says. “Not just talking. I want my legacy to be, Francesca Romana did something.”



Francesca Romana (center) with Sheila Martins at the WSO 2023 in Toronto where the WSO formally acknowledged the Task Force for its significant contribution to stroke care. Prof. Andrew Demchuk, of the Calgary Stroke Program in Canada is on the right.

# Dr Nune's country duty

The public-spirited head neurologist at Armenia's largest hospital heeds a call to lead change and to dream with all her heart.



HELSINKI is not Dr Nune Yeghiazaryan's favorite city.

"I'm sorry," she remembers to say to the Finnish videographer who is recording this conversation.

But even though this isn't, say, Paris or Rome, a familiar impulse to share the emotions and the experiences with people she likes, follows her around the Finnish capital.

Just yesterday she was urging her Armenian fellow delegates to ESOC to shop for something local – like Marimekko, the Finnish brand whose iconic patterns have been reborn in thousands of printed color palettes since the 1950s.

And she is traveling, as always, with the attitude of a student: "I am reading every statue trying to understand, who is that? Why is he standing there, why is he important for Finland?"

“

Right from the start he insisted, you are so good, you are so clever, you should be a doctor.

”

But today's conversation is about why Dr Nune Yeghiazaryan's work is important for Armenia, with

a sidebar on the importance of dreams in a post-Soviet society. An invitation to Armenia will be extended as a matter of course.

The story of how Nune became, first, a medical doctor, and later, head of neurology at Erebouni Medical Center in Yerevan, president of the Armenia Stroke Council, member of the European Academy of Neurology, the ESO and the WSO, and a Spirit of Excellence award nominee in 2025, begins in a Soviet school where she excelled.

"My parents and grandparents are very, very proud of me because I am the best in the school," she recalls. "And in Soviet Armenia, it was accepted that the good pupils became either doctors or lawyers. But I'm a girl. And according to my grandfather, becoming a lawyer is not an appropriate profession for a girl. Right from the start he insisted, you are so good, you are so clever, you should be a doctor."

Her mother joined the cause and, on the misunderstanding that a growing incidence of stress-related disorders she perceived in

the community meant specialists in nervous disorders would be in high demand, made the case for neurology.

By the time Nune graduated from medical school, the decision had been made for her.

At the end of her residency at Yerevan State Medical University under the supervision of prof. Vahagn Darbinyan, Nune followed her professor into epilepsy, built her reputation in epilepsy genetics and sleep disorders, and became head of the busy neurology department at one of the biggest hospitals in the Republic of Armenia several years before it would become a leading implementer of Armenia's National Stroke Program.

The new head of neurology soon discovered that stroke accounted for between 80 and 90 percent of her patients, and that they were ill-prepared to offer appropriate care. "We didn't even consider etiology or specific, secondary prophylaxis," she says, "we were just giving aspirin and waiting."

For a while the situation seemed hopeless, but then, in the darkness, the stars came out.

## Stars to go towards

When she looks back at pictures taken in Barcelona during ESOC 2016, Dr Yeghiazaryan is reminded of a young, shy Nune who was perhaps a little bewildered at finding herself



in the orbit of women like ESO president elect Valeria Caso and Francesca Romana Pezzella.

The official launch of the Angels Initiative, the establishment of the stroke care quality improvement registry RES-Q, and the first anniversary of ESO-EAST (a program to improve stroke care quality in Eastern Europe) made 2016 a momentous year for stroke. "All of a sudden I became part of that," Nune says.

“

I have people I can turn to for advice, who can support me, and Angels was one of them.

”

Stroke transformation in Armenia already had some momentum thanks to the intervention of expatriate Armenian specialists, including Canada-based Dr Mikael Skon Muratoglu, who offered food for thought. "There are two phrases he says very frequently about us Armenian Armenians," Nune says. "One was that

we had lost the ability to dream. When in 2013 he spoke about thrombolysis and thrombectomy becoming available in Armenia, and we said oh, that will not be possible, ever, he said, how dare you not dream? You have let the Soviet even destroy your dreaming!

"And the second thing he was always telling us was, if not now, then when? If not you, then who? Of course, he was saying that to all of us, but only some of us took it literally and followed that command."

Following that command more than defined Nune's professional life: it has put her in the service of her country. She says, "It's not just serving the patients, but the sense that you are doing something on a national basis and taking responsibility for the stroke service throughout the country. You have to do that. And it is more than pleasant. It is a duty towards the country, towards the patients, towards my colleagues, that I feel I must carry.

"I don't only like it, I love it. I feel myself confident in it.

"Previously, when I was training, I may have felt it was safer to join the team and follow the team rather than be on the frontier, a pioneer. It is difficult but to tell you the truth I had some stars to go towards.

"I was not alone and finding my way through the stars. There were

people who guided me, I have people I can turn to for advice, who can support me, and Angels was one of them. But I also understand that there are situations where you have to decide by yourself, you have to have the ability to make a decision."

## Armenian angels

Although Angels had no formal presence in Armenia, Nune would find an invaluable ally in Lev Prystupiuk, the Angels consultant from Ukraine whose benign influence spans countries from Eastern Europe to Central Asia. When Covid hit, his support moved online. Two years later, the Russia invasion of Ukraine further limited Lev's ability to travel to Yerevan, but he has remained their steadfast Armenian angel. "We very much need them," Nune says.

Thrombolysis and mechanical thrombectomy were available in Yerevan from 2016, at the outset only to patients who could cover the costs. But in 2019, the government of Armenia launched the National Stroke Program, initially with Erebouni Medical Center and Yerevan State Medical University Hospital as comprehensive stroke centers. A government decree led to the formation of the Armenian Stroke Council as scientific advisory body, with Dr Nune Yeghiazaryan in the role of president. Since then,





substantial advances have been made in building medical infrastructure and delivering acute stroke care, including in locations far from the capital, in one instance with the aid of telemedicine. Two hospitals in Armenia have received ESO Angels diamond awards.

There has been a continued focus on education. The fifth Armenian Spring Stroke School took place just before the Armenian delegation arrived in Helsinki. The National Stroke Database was poised for lift-off, and the Ministry of Health was

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Like the willingness to lead from the frontier, **empathy cannot be taught.**

”

about to sign the SAP-E declaration, signaling its commitment to the aims of the Stroke Action Plan for Europe.

At Erebouni Medical Center, when Dr Nune has the opportunity to handpick her coworkers from a new intake of residents, she knows what she is looking for. “I will choose the one with a kind personality and empathy for the patients. Scientific knowledge is next but their attitude towards patients is very important, how empathetic and caring there are.”

Like the willingness to lead from the frontier, this is not a quality that can be taught. “I don’t remember my professor teaching me that. He just behaved like that, and if you had the capacity for empathy, you followed his example. It’s very important for a doctor. If you don’t make an effort to listen or understand the patient, you can miss a lot of symptoms. Our professor made us understand that the patient was the most important – their wellbeing and comfort – and that the most important person in the situation wasn’t you.”

### More about dreams

Nune’s bio on the Angels website (where she appears in her capacity as steering committee member) uniquely concludes with a bit of personal information: “Dr Yeghiazaryan is very fond of





traveling and discovering new places and new people. She enjoys swimming, the beach, and good food and cooking."

She knows her mother's recipes by heart, the correct ingredients and sequence of actions, but except for a few times a year, there are more important things to do, Nune says. One is making sure that international experts who come to Armenia for stroke schools and conferences leave the country with admiration in their hearts.

It's not only her doing, it's a national trait. "We like to show you where to walk, where to sit and have a coffee or a cognac or something. Every visitor gets this personal and very, very kind attention. Armenians show you the country to make you fall in love with it and come back."

She hopes we will visit. "Just find me. I will make your being in Armenia wonderful, believe me."

We do.

Dr Nune has not exhausted her capacity for dreaming, but what she most urgently desires is a mind at ease about the health and welfare of the people she loves. "I'm a very anxious person," she confides, constantly worried about the health of her father and brother.

"To work at full strength, I need to feel certain that everyone is okay and in a good place. Then I could work even harder to improve the life of the patients. It would make my life much, much, much easier.

"So, I dream with all my heart."





# Staying in the fight against stroke



**Working in stroke care combines everything she believes in, SAFE president Prof. Harriet Proios says – “helping people, building communities, education, science, advocacy and creating change”.**

**HAD** your life turned upside down by stroke? Then welcome to the margins of society where disability stigma would consign you to a lifetime of social isolation. Gone may be any semblance of life as you knew it, and so perhaps your memory, attention span and ability to control your emotions. Over here you may struggle to sustain friendships and relationships, find work and make ends meet. Be prepared that from now on fewer people will pay attention to what you say, and if you struggle to get the words out, some will stop listening altogether.

You are not alone. In the next 12 months over one million more people in Europe will suffer a stroke. About 40 percent won't survive beyond 3 months. Of those who do, a significant proportion will experience long-term disability and, in the absence of support for life after stroke, join you on the sidelines.

You may be surprised to learn that there are people who find your courage inspiring. Who have watched you show up day after day, make the same commitment every single day, have the hard conversations, and keep going despite system flaws and setbacks. Who are inspired by stroke survivors and “carers who stay patient and loving even when they're financially burdened, they've lost friendships and they're completely exhausted”. Who have watched you emerge from catastrophe with a goal to contribute to the world.

## Sidelines to the stage

Chief among your admirers is Prof. Hariklia “Harriet” Proios, president of the Stroke Alliance For Europe (SAFE), who is determined to ensure that every stroke survivor gets the care, support and respect they deserve, no matter where they live and what resources they have.

“The disparities in stroke care across different European countries are heartbreaking – some places provide incredible support, while in others, people are left to navigate recovery on their own. That's something I'm determined to work to change,” she said after commencing a second three-year term as SAFE president last June.

“SAFE is not a survivor group,” she says. Rather, it is the leading voice of stroke survivors and support groups in Europe and an umbrella

organization of stroke support organizations in Europe. By uniting stroke survivor organizations (SSOs) from more than 30 countries under one umbrella, SAFE unlocks the power to bring a patient perspective to high-profile interventions, influence policy and turn knowledge into action.

Twenty years old in 2024, SAFE is co-architect of the Stroke Action Plan for Europe (SAP-E), which it developed with the European Stroke Organization (ESO) and stroke experts from across Europe, after its Burden of Stroke in Europe report (published in 2018) revealed shocking disparities between and within countries on the continent. It published The Economic Impact of Stroke in Europe in 2020, and A Life Saved is a Life Worth Living in 2023, which shone a light on the unmet needs of stroke survivors in Europe.

“

**Every stroke survivor who turns their struggle into strength for others are my heroes.**

”

SAFE is also founder and custodian of the European Life After Stroke Forum (ELASF), an annual knowledge-sharing and networking event where aspects of life after stroke are addressed by healthcare professionals, researchers, policymakers and survivors in a program co-designed by people





Harriet with Bulgaria's superheroes, FAST Heroes advocates Dimitar Hadzhivalchev and Elica Hadzhivalcheva.

affected by stroke. Like SAFE itself, this annual forum seeks to move survivors from the sidelines to the stage. At this year's meeting in Prague, the first stroke survivor-led plenary session included presentations by four stroke survivors who are also members of the ELASF scientific program committee, and the two top-scoring abstracts from the inaugural lived experience abstract category. Over 70 abstracts had been submitted in this new category by stroke survivors who were either involved in research, creating support and resource networks in their communities, or just wanted to share their stories.

Survivors who redirect lives that have been disrupted by stroke are among the people Harriet admires most. She says: "Every stroke survivor who turns their struggle into strength for others are my heroes."

### Heroes to superheroes

Harriet was born in New York, to Greek immigrants Despina and Sotirios Proios, whom she credits (in the preamble to her doctoral thesis) with never allowing "their hardships to interfere with the emotional stability, financial security, love and encouragement" they provided to her and her sister, Klavdia.

Harriet studied psychology and speech pathology at Hofstra University, and for her PhD in speech and language pathology at Columbia University examined how people with aphasia organized concepts into categories. Her work in research, clinical care and teaching took her to the Princeton Medical Center and as a faculty member at





the graduate program of Montclair State University in New Jersey, and as a Research Associate to Harvard University and the Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital in Boston. In 2000, the avowed globalist relocated to Switzerland where she was speech pathologist and research associate at the University Hospital of Zurich. In 2003 she moved to Greece where, in 2014, after a decade of clinical work in rehabilitation, she became assistant professor of Neurocognitive Disorders and Rehabilitation in the Department of Educational and Social Policy at the University of Macedonia in Thessaloniki. She was granted tenure in 2018, and promoted to full professor in 2024.

Ever the globalist and with a focus on driving global change, she commutes between Thessaloniki and New York where last year she assumed the role of chair of the Department of Communications Sciences and Disorders at the Ruth S. Ammon College of Education and Health Sciences at Adelphi University.

At a SAFE meeting shortly after joining the board in 2017, Harriet heard Angels cofounder Jan van der Merwe talk about a project that was then barely out of the starting blocks – a stroke awareness campaign that would target kindergarten and elementary school children. Jan had arrived at the concept via a series of insights, the first of which was that the primary target audience

for stroke awareness education (so-called Baby Boomers born between 1946 and 1964) would rather not talk about stroke. His second insight came from studies that showed that the first thing most people did when they had a stroke was to ask their children for advice, and that in most cases the advice was wrong.

“

**The best thing about FAST Heroes was that from the beginning we made sure there was scientific evidence for the whole journey.**

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The third insight provided the spark for what would become the FAST Heroes campaign. Statistics included in the Eurostat Ageing Europe report showed that more than half of people aged 50-64 spent at least several days a week caring for their grandchildren. This raised the question, could children be positioned as health promoters in their families and teach their parents and grandparents about stroke?

The next consideration was what to teach them and what learning theories to employ.

Jan's meeting with Harriet signalled the start of a collaboration that would see FAST Heroes implemented in 27 countries, win numerous awards, and by the start of 2025, reach its first major milestone as the number of children educated about stroke passed the one million mark.

In Thessaloniki, a multi-disciplinary team including educators, school psychologists, nurses and musicians went to work to develop a five-week school-based stroke education programme that was classroom-ready, culturally adapted to children's interests, and optimised to make learning last. The young children of some of Harriet's graduate students were test subjects for the program before it moved to the classroom for further refinement.

It was Harriet's goal all along to give a scientific foundation to efforts to teach children, and the project was so designed that it was amenable to scientific foundation. She says, “The best thing about FAST Heroes was that from the beginning we made sure there was scientific evidence for the whole journey.”

Follow-up research has demonstrated its effectiveness as a tool for transferring knowledge from children to their families. The results of a stroke preparedness questionnaire before and after implementation showed that knowledge of stroke symptoms





At the FAST Heroes Summit 2025.

had increased from 38 percent to 87 percent, and knowledge of the emergency number from 40 percent to 100 percent.

An unforeseen effect of the campaign has been that dozens of children around the world who have completed the program have embraced the duties of a superhero by using their knowledge to come to the rescue of grandparents and others.

### Treasure the moment

She is proud of her students and glad the FAST Heroes project is in her life, Harriet says. Working in stroke care combines everything she believes in – “helping people, building communities, education, science, advocacy and creating change”. Nothing inspires her quite as much as transformation. Connecting people and ideas gives her pleasure. So does reflection. She is an adherent of the Japanese concept, *ichigo ichie*, the idea of treasuring the unrepeatable nature of a moment.

Her capacity for showing up in the moment is in the spotlight when she receives an ESO Spirit of Excellence Award at ESOC 2025. In the nominees' video, on the stage in Helsinki, and in subsequent interviews, she is forthright and generous, expressing herself with clarity and intensity.

Becoming president of SAFE for the second term has been a personal turning point, she says. “It has really reshaped me. I have realized that I can combine my global work, my academic work as well as stroke recovery with meaningful leadership.”

She has learnt to lead with the belief that passion doesn't need drama, she says with a nod to the Greek appetite for the theatrical. “It has made me become calm and clear and intentional in the way I serve.”

SAFE's vision is of a Europe where preventable stroke is eliminated, where the conditions exist for equitable care, and every life saved is a life worth living. At its heart the organization has the unity and diversity of the voices of people with lived experience, who are prepared to stay in the fight for themselves and others. And at its head, a servant leader with passion and drive and the belief that every moment is an opportunity.

# One in a million



Department of Neurology and Neurophysiology at Grey's Hospital.

Endurance racing is a test of mental toughness and the ability to manage setbacks. So is establishing a world class service in an under-resourced and frequently overcrowded healthcare setting. But that doesn't mean it can't be done.

DR SHARANIA MOODLEY'S commute to work takes her to within spitting distance of one of the dozen or more world-class private hospitals dotted around the busy port city of Durban in South Africa's KwaZulu Natal province. Then it heads inland. Between Cato Ridge and Camperdown, it crosses into the uMgungundlovu district municipality, before curving northwest towards Pietermaritzburg.

It is a route well-known to veterans of the almost 90 km long Comrades Marathon, an iconic race in the world of long-distance endurance running. The Comrades changes direction every year, with the route from Durban to Pietermaritzburg known as the "up run". When her shift ends, the down run will take Dr Moodley back home.

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Private hospitals may be on Dr Moodley's route to work but they're not on her radar.

**“My role is in the state sector,”** she says.

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Dr Moodley is a neurologist and stroke champion at Grey's Hospital, a state-run referral hospital with a history dating back to the mid-nineteenth century. It is one of just three state hospitals in the province that offer a neurological service, and the only one so far to be recognized for its stroke care quality with a WSO Angels Award. Across South Africa, only two other public hospitals have earned that distinction.

Private hospitals may be on Dr Moodley's route to work but they're not on her radar. “My role is in the state sector,” she says with calm emphasis. This is where she can reach the largest possible number of patients.

South Africa's public healthcare system is short of everything including specialists. Of the country's approximately 294 neurologists, only a small fraction work in public hospitals that provide care to 90 percent of the population. This means that while the ratio in the private sector is almost in line with the WHO recommended minimum of 100,000 patients per neurologist,



Dr Sharania Moodley





the public sector has approximately one neurologist per one million patients.

This is what makes Dr Moodley's route to work so significant.

### Inviting Angels

Sharania Moodley is a Durban girl and she has always wanted to be a doctor.

When her older brother entered medical school well ahead of her, the dream began to grow roots. Like him, Sharania would attend Nelson R. Mandela Medical School at the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN). In her fourth year at medical school she attended a tutorial led by the legendary Prof. Pierre Bill (first head of neurology at UKZN) and was struck by his bedside manner, kindness and patience. He also made her irresistibly aware of neurology as an intellectually stimulating specialty and an exacting test of clinical acumen.

As a registrar Sharania was inspired to improve stroke care by Emeritus Professor Ahmed Iqbal Bhigjee and Professor Vinod Patel, past and current heads of neurology at Inkosi Albert Luthuli Hospital – a key teaching hospital for the medical school at UKZN and itself named for a liberation struggle

leader and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.

Having been awakened to the need for improved acute stroke care in the state sector, she took careful note of the groundbreaking work by Dr Louis Kroon at Steve Biko Academic Hospital in Pretoria, and by Asst. Prof. Deanna Saylor at the University Teaching Hospital in Zambia. Sharania realized that as a neurologist she had work to

do in order to seamlessly manage patients with acute stroke in her hospital.

"Stroke care is our space," she says. If the neurology department at Grey's Hospital didn't have a stroke protocol, its stroke patients would not receive nationally and internationally accepted standards of care.

In January 2023, backed by the Head of Clinical Unit, neurologist



Karthi (left) and Kavi are the Comrades runners in Sharania's family.

Dr Ansuya Naidoo, Dr Sharanita Moodley wrote an important email that would help shape the next two years. Determined that Grey's Hospital should become stroke ready, she invited the Angels Initiative to visit her hospital.

### Dr Moodley's up run

In the Comrades Marathon, the "up run" from Durban to Pietermaritzburg has a deservedly cruel reputation. Seven infamous hills along the route turn the race into a seemingly never-ending upward slog – not unlike the attempt to create change in an underfunded, understaffed and frequently overcrowded healthcare setting. In these challenging circumstances, it helps to have a friend by your side who can offer crucial support and encouragement. Barely a week after receiving Dr Moodley's email, Angels consultant Maxeen Murugan-Thevar signed up to be her running partner.

Having drawn up a simple standard operating procedure (SOP) for treating patients with acute stroke, Dr Moodley's "up run" faced at least three steep hills. To reach the finish line, she would have to convince members of her own department of the urgent need to be stroke ready, convince other departments to support the project in word and deed, and convince an executive committee composed of among others the hospital CEO, medical manager, nursing manager, and quality program coordinator, to endorse implementation of the SOP



The sunset over Durban's Moses Mabhida Stadium at the end of this year's Comrades marathon.

and make a bed available where patients treated with thrombolysis could be monitored for 24 hours.

The third hill had seemed the most daunting, but then Dr Moodley found someone else running beside her.

The quality program coordinator had a personal story to share. Her own father had a stroke in 2020, she said at the conclusion of the meeting. He was taken to a private hospital where he received immediate care, and made a remarkable recovery.

The episode left a lasting impression of how important it was to receive care within the golden window following a stroke, and deepened her understanding of the

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This would vastly **improve patient outcomes** and **reduce the burden of patient care on family members.**

”

importance of making timely care available and a priority for stroke patients in the government sector. This would vastly improve patient outcomes and reduce the burden of patient care on family members and ultimately the cost to the state.



Nursing staff from the neurology ward, medical admission ward and emergency department of Grey's Hospital with Sharanita. From left, they are Sister Saloshanie Govender, Fikile Mjwara, and Rabia Mahomed.



It took a few months for the executive committee to confirm their support for Sharania's project, and a very long year before the first qualifying patient arrived within an hour of symptom onset. But finally a male patient in his fifties was admitted to the ER on what he didn't know was the luckiest day of his life.

“

I ask myself, in my short lifetime, **what can I do to make the space better than I found it?**

”

When news reached Maxeen's ears that Dr Moodley's team had successfully treated their first patient, she went to the hospital as soon as she could. She saw smiles, she could sense a new kind of team spirit, but when she went to meet the stroke survivor, the bed was empty. Grey's Hospital's first thrombolized stroke patient had woken up fighting fit and taken himself home.

### “I celebrated within myself”

In May 2025, a poster detailing Grey's Hospital's stroke journey won first prize at the Congress of the Neurological Association of South Africa. By then Dr Moodley, who

had added capturing stroke patient data in RES-Q to her list of tasks, already knew that Grey's Hospital was about to write itself into the history books.

She didn't know quite how to react to the news that Grey's Hospital had won a WSO Angels Award. “It sounded huge, but it didn't feel big,” she says. “I celebrated within myself as we still had yet to achieve diamond status.”

Winning the award, however rare and commendable in South Africa's challenging public healthcare sector, didn't mean Dr Moodley's up run was at the end. After all, gold status in the Angels Awards only confirmed that the hospital was implementing the standard of care, as she would tell anyone who asked if the achievement was sustainable. They still had more work to do, which included a review of the post-acute phase that took most of the first half of 2025. Only then did she feel that her hospital was finally stroke ready.

If neurology registrars rotating through Grey's decide to bite the bullet in the state system instead of being absorbed into one of the private hospital networks, at least not right away, it may be because they have witnessed a compelling example of what is possible once someone puts their mind to do something.

“We don't have a lot but there are things we can do,” is Dr Moodley's mantra. It rings true for both her professional and personal life.



Sharania and acting hospital CEO Dr Nhlakanipho Gumede receive the WSO Angels Award from Angels consultant, Maxeen Murugan-Thevar.

Having worked hard to earn her place in medical school, she now makes the best use of limited resources to give back to as many people as she can, as generously as she can: “I ask myself, in my short lifetime, what can I do to make the space better than I found it?”

Before Dr Moodley's SOP for stroke care was implemented at her hospital, ambulance services in the area would bypass Grey's if they had a suspected stroke on board. But since word got out that Grey's didn't just have a stroke protocol but was also an internationally recognized stroke centre, they have been known to bypass the private hospitals and – like Dr Moodley on her morning commute – set their course for Grey's.



Sharania and Maxeen with members of the neurology team. From left, Sister Saloshanie Govender, Dr MC Nkalakata, Dr A Naidoo and Dr K Naidu, and Dr I Jhazbhay.

# Peak performance in Nowotarski

Bright spots lit the way to Angels Region status for this dramatically beautiful corner of southern Poland where Angels consultant Kasia Putyło led a nail-biting last-minute sprint to success.

TURBACZ is the highest of many gentle peaks that dominate the Gorce Mountains in southernmost Poland. It offers beautiful views of the snowcapped Tatra and Pieniny Mountains, especially from the scenic clearings along the green trail leading up from the city of Nowy Targ.

Angels consultant Katarzyna Putyło (Kasia) had always wanted to hike up these mountains and after Nowotarski was identified as a potential Angels Region, she looked forward to visiting her favourite part of Poland.

But throughout 2024, bad weather conditions kept her grounded, and in the end Nowotarski would be confirmed as an Angels Region before she made it to the top of Turbacz.

When the regional strategy was launched at ESOC 2024, this region's two primary centres – Sucha Beskidzka Hospital and Nowy Targ Hospital – already had nearly 40 diamond awards between them. It was the legacy of former Angels consultant

Mateusz Stolarczyk, who had steered both hospitals to their first Angels Award in 2018.

Nowotarski was a strong candidate for Angels Region status. Two hospitals with stroke units provided adequate coverage to stroke patients in the region, and the public awareness goal was also within sight. Thanks to the support of Dr Paweł Wrona in neighbouring Krakow, Nowotarski was about to become one of the first regions in Poland to meet their target for FAST Heroes implementation.

The complete absence of data gathering by all three of the regions' EMS services was the last remaining challenge, or so it appeared.



The stroke team at Nowy Targ Hospital. Head neurologist, Dr Iwona Sinkiewicz is second from right.

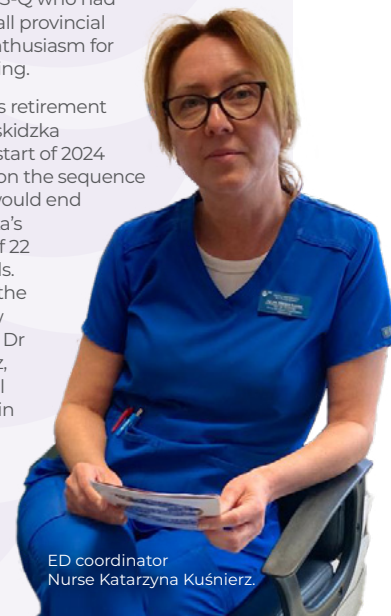


Angels consultant Kasia Putyło

## People power

The Nowotarski success story was a story about bright spots and amazing people, Kasia said in the weeks following the regional celebration. On the guest list for the ceremony had been two bright spots who, though they were no longer active in the region, continued to spread their light. Mateusz Stolarczyk, now the globetrotting leader of Angels teams in South Africa, Indonesia and Ukraine, made it back to Poland for the event. And Kasia reserved a front row seat for retired Dr Jerzy Binek, a staunch advocate for RES-Q who had infected his small provincial hospital with enthusiasm for quality monitoring.

It was Dr Binek's retirement from Sucha Beskidzka Hospital at the start of 2024 that set in motion the sequence of events that would end Sucha Beskidzka's unbroken run of 22 diamond awards. He had passed the mantle to fellow data enthusiast Dr Patrycja Derbis, and the hospital went on to reel in



ED coordinator  
Nurse Katarzyna Kuśnierz



two more diamond awards. But after Dr Derbis left to pursue specialization and motherhood, the demands of data entry couldn't be met consistently.

This meant that, as well as turning Sucha Beskidzka EMS into a contender for an EMS Angels Award, Kasia had to get the hospital back on track. Fortunately, a new generation of bright spots was ready to shine.

The first of these appeared in the shape of emergency department coordinator Nurse Katarzyna Kuśnierz, who embraced the task of uploading the EMS data to RES-Q. It soon emerged that some prehospital data was falling through the cracks.



At Nowy Targ Hospital Kasia had found “a stroke champion with **Angels spirit**”.



“Prenotification wasn't being captured,” Kasia says. “So the paramedics were calling ahead but not recording it.” It was a problem easily solved with an improved prehospital checklist, and in Q4 of 2024, following a training program that included ASLS, the ambulance team at Sucha Beskidzka earned their first and potentially their last gold award. They reach diamond status in Q1 of 2025.

At Nowy Targ Hospital Kasia had found, in its head neurologist, Dr Iwona Sinkiewicz, “a stroke champion with Angels spirit”. The hospital already had an almost flawless pathway that implemented all the key priority actions recommended by Angels, and Dr Sinkiewicz was enthusiastic about the Angels Region strategy and determined to be first. Plus she had just the right medicine for an EMS coordinator who wasn't that keen on quality monitoring.

At a training event for two EMS services (from Nowy Targ and Zakopane), Dr Sinkiewicz shared her hospital's data from when they first started treating stroke with thrombolysis. After being



Award handover to Sucha Beskidzka Hospital. Dr Jerzy Binek is third from left.



Ewa Kondera (second from right) at the awards handover to Nowy Targ EMS.

shown the dramatic reduction in door-to-needle time from 66 minutes to an average of 30 minutes, the EMS coordinator was on board. And with paramedic Ewa Kondera putting up her hand to capture the data in RES-Q, Nowy Targ EMS was soon on track for platinum status.

Over at Zakopane EMS, Kasia had made the acquaintance of not one but two more data collection enthusiasts, paramedics Paweł Mickowski and Justyna Długopolska. Committed though they were to data-driven improvement, by mid January these two bright spots were at risk of missing out on their Q4 platinum award when the deadline caught them off guard. But help was on the way.

## Time flies

When newcomers to quality monitoring upload their data for the first time, she always schedules an in-person meeting right before the quarterly deadline, Kasia says. This opportunity for eleventh-hour troubleshooting was the reason why January 2025 saw her traveling once again to her favorite part of Poland which was now in the grip of an icy winter.

At Zakopane EMS station, a last-minute technical setback had ruled out data entry via the usual channels. Fortunately, this was a team accustomed to thinking on their feet in a crisis, and familiar with the two-way radio as a communication lifeline in an emergency. Capturing quality monitoring data with the help of a walkie talkie was a first, Kasia admits. And it was not yet the end of her deadline adventures.

The team in Nowy Targ, where data

protection issues had caused delays, was also at risk of missing the deadline and the stakes were rising by the hour. By now Kasia knew that one more EMS Award was all it would take for Nowotarski to become an Angels Region, and Ewa Kondera was determined that Nowy Targ should not be the reason that goal wasn't met.

Knuckling down, Kasia and Ewa wrapped up the task at 10.30 pm – 90 minutes shy of the deadline and much too late to drive home. Besides, the weather had taken a turn for the worse, and high winds and heavy rain made travel hazardous.

An “extreme but amazing experience” ended in a sleepover that sealed the bond of friendship between Kasia and Ewa.

By March 2025, Nowotarski was easing into early spring, with temperatures occasionally rising to 17 degrees. Kasia was back in Nowy Targ to plan the celebration, and it was finally time to climb the mountain.

“It was an emotional celebration for me,” she says of finally reaching the highest peak. “I highly recommend it, because the views from up there are amazing.”



Zakopane EMS receive their awards.



Sucha Beskidzka Ambulance Crew



Nowy Targ EMS

# Stroke survivor

## Diana's Story

In her work as an Angels consultant, she see multiple cases where, thanks to good practices implemented in clinics, hospitals, and ambulance teams, patients have been given a new lease on life, writes Andrea Torres. This is one of them.

IT'S 5 am on January 6, 2025 and nurse Diana Jiménez is getting ready for work. She has been awake for several hours and feels disorientated. Woken up at around 3 am by a feeling like pressure inside her head, she wasn't able to get back to sleep.

Diana is a nursing assistant at the Avidanti Clinic in the city of Ibagué in Colombia. The clinic is a high-complexity institution, with capacity for 140 hospital beds and 45 critical care beds. It has a hemodynamics room, four operating rooms, cardiology and gastroenterology units, as well as specialized outpatient consultation, emergencies, diagnostic imaging, and specialized clinical laboratory services.

“

Riding her motorcycle to the hospital 15 km away, Diana feels **“disorientated and disconnected”**

”

Angels consultant Andrea Torres has been working with the hospital since 2023, with the goal to improve care for patients with strokes.

Single mom Diana (45) has worked at Avidanti for 16 years. Her morning

shift, in the hospitalization unit on the fifth floor, starts at 7 am. When her mother arrives at her house at 6 am to keep an eye on Diana's 12-year-old son who is on vacation from school, she notices the apartment is unusually messy and Diana doesn't seem herself. However, she waves her off, unaware that her daughter may be having a stroke.

Riding her motorcycle in the direction of the hospital 15 km away, Diana feels “disorientated and disconnected”. Later she will say that she doesn't know how she made it to the clinic as she felt scarcely able to recognize the streets. Once arrived, she parks her motorcycle and takes the lift to the fifth floor to take over from the nurse on night shift, Gustavo Valenzuela.

All the personnel at the Avidanti Clinic have been trained to recognize stroke, regardless of their role and department, and each service has a protocol for immediately activating



Stroke survivor Diana Jiménez with Dr Milton Fannor Innagan Benavides.



care in suspected stroke cases. This is what happens now when Gustavo realizes Diana's speech isn't making any sense. After instructing another colleague to stay with her, he goes to find the on-call doctor, general practitioner Dr Milton Fannor Innagan Benavides. Dr Innagan examines Diana using the Cincinatti scale, then immediately takes her to the emergency room and activates the stroke code.

A CT scan confirms Diana is having an ischaemic stroke. Her NIHSS score is seven, indicating a moderate stroke. Thrombolysis commences at 9 am. Then Diana is transferred to the intensive care unit where she will undergo more tests to determine the cause of the stroke.

“

Seeing cases like Diana's – of people who having had a stroke are **living normal lives and enjoying happiness with their families** – makes me proud of my work as an Angels consultant.

”

After two weeks of stroke unit care, Diana is set for a complete recovery. Tests have revealed a patent foramen ovale (a small opening in the heart that remains open after birth). Thanks to the timely care of her colleagues at the clinic, she is unmarked by her stroke.

Diana's case demonstrated the importance of having the entire clinic trained in stroke, Andrea says.

“This case also leads us to reflect how often, despite sensing something's physically wrong, patients try to continue with their activities rather than listen to their body. If Diana had not worked at the clinic, this story would likely have had a very different ending.

“It also shows that despite all the educational campaigns conducted among the general population, awareness remains insufficient, and we must continue with this work. This is demonstrated perfectly in the case of Diana's mother who, despite observing her daughter's 'strange' behaviour, allows her to go to work.

It never occurs to her that Diana's symptoms may be due to stroke.

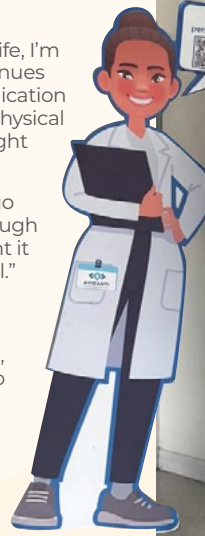
“Seeing cases like Diana's – of people who having had a stroke are living normal lives and enjoying happiness with their families – makes me proud of my work as an Angels consultant.”

As for Diana, she is back at work, and symptom-free.

She says, “I live a normal life, I'm still working. My life continues as before. I'm taking medication but I have no mental or physical limitations. I was in the right place at the right time.”

Feeling half of her body go numb was a physically tough experience. “Even though it was brief, it was impactful.”

She is deeply grateful to her colleagues for their vigilance and swift action, Diana says. “And I am also very attentive to patients' symptoms, because receiving timely care and being able to continue living is a tremendous blessing.”

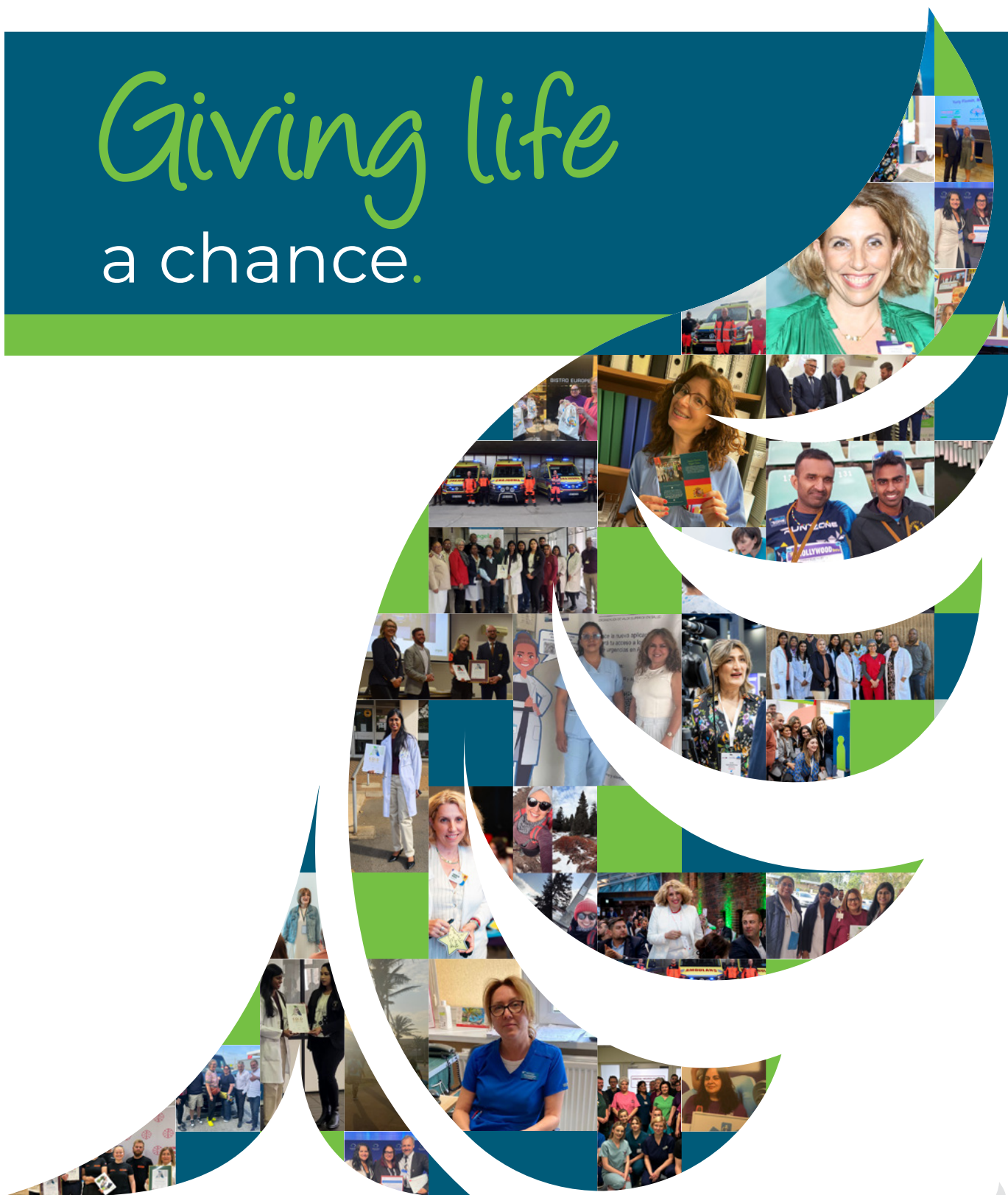


Diana Jiménez and Andrea Torres



Diana Jiménez

# Giving life a chance.



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