

The **ANGELS** *Journey*



MAY 2026 | ESOC EDITION

CELEBRATING
angela
10 YEARS

A large, circular graphic with a white background and a grey border. Inside the circle, the text 'CELEBRATING' is in a small, grey, uppercase font. Below it, 'angela' is written in a large, lowercase font, with 'ange' in green and 'la' in red. To the right of 'angela' is a large, stylized white wing icon. Below 'angela', the number '10' is in a large, red font, followed by 'YEARS' in a smaller, grey, uppercase font. The background of the circle is decorated with small white stars and sparkles.

Scroll down or click on
the arrows to keep reading



Our story

Many people think that it's big events that change the world. Chaos theory says no. The idea that small changes can trigger vast outcomes is known as the butterfly effect. We are asked to imagine a butterfly's wing flap causing a typhoon . . .

ON 1 December 2013, a stroke felled a head teacher in a small town in South Africa. It was a catastrophe, but in the vastness of our universe, it was a butterfly's wing flap that would ultimately lead to countless lives saved.

The failure of a South African hospital to diagnose and treat his mother-in-law's stroke led Boehringer Ingelheim employee Jan van der Merwe to a stunning realization. Almost two decades after thrombolysis became the gold standard for managing acute ischemic stroke, fewer than ten out of South Africa's 600 hospitals had implemented protocols to treat stroke patients according to evidence-based guidelines. Nor was the problem unique to his home country. Across the globe, a fraction of eligible patients were receiving acute treatment for stroke, and the majority of hospitals that admitted stroke patients didn't treat them at all.



Thomas Fischer (left) and Jan van der Merwe, cofounders of the Angels Initiative.



Chance meeting

Chaos theory notes something else about our fragile world, namely that small events that have enormous consequences can sometimes escape our notice. When this happens, we say the effect is due to chance.

So we call it 'chance' that, in late 2014, Jan made the acquaintance of Thomas Fischer, whose aptitude for building friendships and partnerships and creating consensus around new ideas would become invaluable to the Angels Initiative.

Like Jan, Thomas had been galvanized by the realization that access to high-quality stroke care varied dramatically between regions and countries. Separately, they had each taken action to change the prospects of stroke patients and their families – Thomas by establishing the QUICK program, a stroke care data collection and analysis concept to speed up treatment times, and by joining forces with the newly established European Stroke Organisation (ESO) to form ESO EAST, a stroke care quality intervention in Eastern Europe.





From the first meeting in Barcelona to the first training in Mainz, the early days forged deep connections and enduring friendships.



Jan had won the support of the largest private healthcare insurance company in South Africa for a stroke care intervention that would shield others affected by stroke from the trauma his own family was experiencing. It was an intervention that could ultimately make evidence-based acute stroke treatment in dedicated stroke-ready hospitals available to the entire stroke population.

In 2015, they became a joint force, traveling far and wide to provide stroke training to hospitals in developing countries. The more doctors they trained, the more they learned, and the more they learned, the more the concept for the Angels Initiative took shape.

Taking wing

By early 2016 the Angels Initiative had a name, a strategy to build a global community of stroke-ready hospitals and a goal – to reach 1,500 hospitals by May 2019. In Barcelona on 10 May, day one of the 2nd European Stroke Organisation Conference saw the official launch of a project that, 10 years on, has reached every goal, and exceeded every target.

With over 300,000 registered users on the Angels website, it is the world's largest stroke community, a truly global movement that spans multiple continents. Over 200,000 courses have been completed in our online learning

A red bag filled with hope and possibility that travels between countries and continents.



Ghana



Poland



Mexico



India



platform, the Angels Academy. Since 2016, 9,308 WSO and ESO Angels Awards have been awarded to 1,677 hospitals world-wide and since the EMS Angels Awards were launched in 2021, 277 prehospital care providers have won a total of 1,045 awards.

The target of 1,500 hospitals by December 2019 was reached in 2018, and the number of registered Angels hospitals now exceeds 10,000. It is estimated that more than 50 million stroke patients will receive evidence-based care in Angels hospitals by 2030.

The Angels-supported schools-based awareness program, FAST Heroes, has reached more than one million children and two million grandparents. And the strategy to convert 100 Angels Regions by December 2027 overshot its target earlier this year.

This issue of the Angels Journey is a pictorial celebration of a decade of Angels, and if you are reading this, you are part of our story. Thank you for continuing to inspire us and for giving stroke patients a second chance at life.



We got our feet wet in South Africa in 2017.



Preparing for our next chapter: supporting ICH care bundle implementation.



Portraits of excellence

THERE'S no finer moment on the Angels annual calendar than when past winners of the Spirit of Excellence Award rise to their feet to recognize a new class of winners and nominees for one of stroke's most prestigious awards.

There's no better opportunity to watch the power of community in action, no more moving spectacle than seeing respected, impassioned and active stroke champions being welcomed into a community of peers.

Given every year since 2017 to a handful of individuals around the world, the Spirit of Excellence Award is a prestigious award for which outstanding members of the global stroke community are nominated by their peers – not only for doing their own work extremely well, but for reaching out beyond their own

hospitals and cities, and having an impact across regional and national boundaries.

These bright spots are the influencers in the Angels community – individuals who, having earned the trust and respect of their equals, inspire or guide the actions of others. As well as giving recognition where it is due, the awards are an opportunity to amplify their influence in order to maximize their value to the community, and to ensure their actions serve as a model for those who will follow in their footsteps.



Dr Angela Konze (center) received the Spirit of Excellence Award in 2022.



Prof Hariklia Proios, a winner in 2025.



Dr Anna Vakarchuk, 2018.



Prof Francisco Moniche, 2022.



The Spirit of Excellence Awards

An open door

The honor roll is long and luminous.

In Europe alone, more than 55 polished nickel wings have alighted on the desks and bookshelves of people who have helped define our community.

Furthermore, its composition reflects two fundamental truths about quality stroke care.

One is that, aside from neurologists, those honored to date include five nurses, six paramedics, a radiologist, a physiotherapist, two patient advocates, and one survivor. It gives expression to the idea that stroke is everyone's business and requires cohesive working across multidisciplinary teams.



Dr Francisco Purroy, 2025.

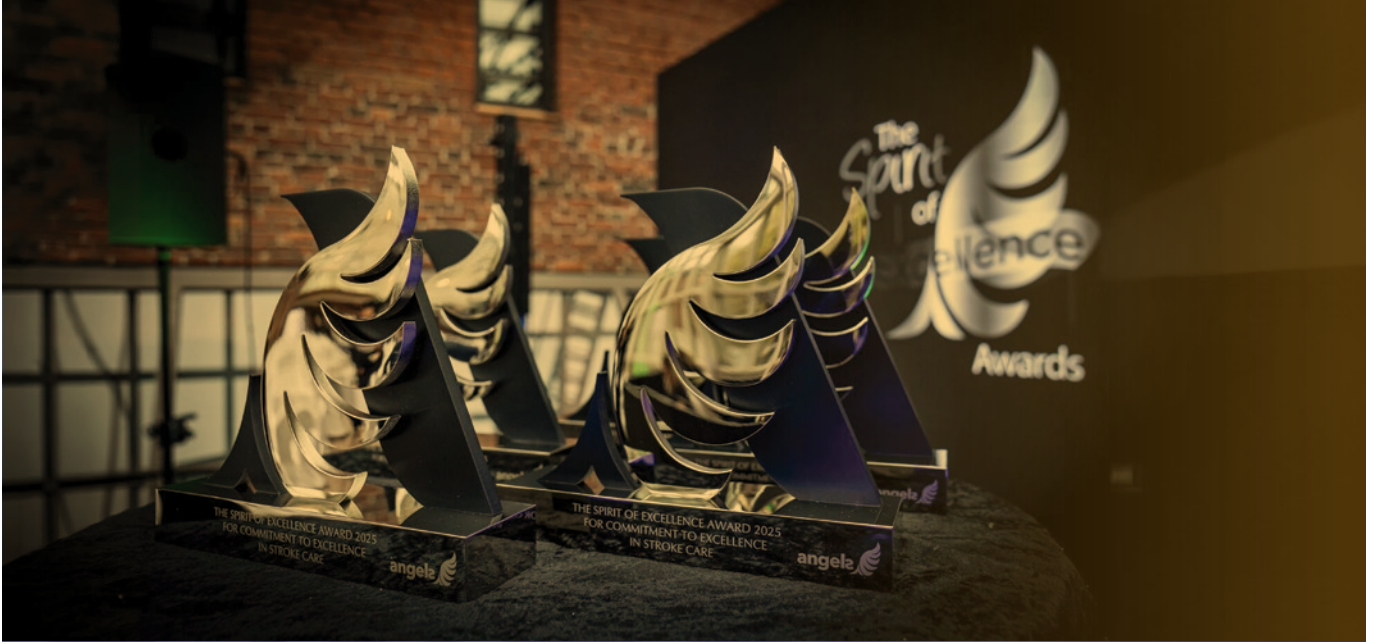


Team Italy with nominee Matteo Rovera at the Spirit of Excellence gala dinner in 2024.



Dr Pawel Wrona, 2024.





Team Romania in 2023.





Raimundo Caro Quesada,
nominee in 2023.



Secondly, it tells stories about leadership and teamwork. Without exception, the winners are also leaders who share both their courage and the credit. And sometimes the winner is a team, made up of people who leverage each other's strengths to achieve a common purpose.

Teams like Spain's awesome foursome, emergency specialists Francisco Arande, Antonio Iglesias, Nicolas Riera, and Montse Gorchs, winners in 2021. Or Romania's dream team of Elena Oana Terecoasă, Dr Răzvan Radu, and Dr Vlad Tiu in 2023; and Team Lithuania – Aleksandras Vilionski, Antanas Vaitkus, Vaidas Matijosaitis, and Dalius Jatuzis – honored in 2024 for their role in transforming stroke care in countries throughout Eastern Europe and Central Asia.





Dr Rosita Krasteva,
nominee in 2024.







Joaquín García, 2024.



The Spirit of Excellence Award gala dinner is a joyful celebration and an annual highlight of the Angels calendar in Europe.



Petr Jaššo, 2022.



Dr. Kristaps Jurjāns.

The Spirit of Excellence Awards

The Spirit of Excellence Award is a chance to turn up the brightness on these shining examples – but it is also a moment to say thank you.

In 2017, Spirit of Excellence winner, Poland's Anna Członkowska, told a meeting of neurologists: "Remember, when Angels knock on the door, open it."

We are deeply grateful to the winners and nominees – past, present and future – for holding open the door.





Assist. Prof. Dr. Hrvoje Budinčević, 2025.

Educating for change

IN 2019, Dr Nurbakyt Serikova from Kazakhstan accepted an invitation to attend an Angels Train-the-trainer event. During the two days she spent in Mainz, Germany, the future of stroke care in Kazakhstan's Aktoobe province came into focus. Returning from Mainz, Dr Nurbakyt saw no reason why stroke care in Aktoobe shouldn't be as good as or better than in other parts of the world. Having heard the testimony of stroke doctors from other countries, she says, "I understood that it depended on us, that humans could change it."



Dr Nurbakyt Serikova.





Learning, like changing, requires an open mind that embraces the idea that there may be a better way to do things. Before any learning can take place, we must, in the words of one expert, place 'a welcome mat at the threshold of the mind'.

For Angels, the aim of education is not simply to impart knowledge, but to change practice. Doctors and nurses at Angels hospitals must adopt new habits in relation to stroke care. The training agenda is intentionally focused on actions which, if carried out consistently and with speed and skill, raise the standard of stroke treatment in any hospital or EMS, anywhere in the world.

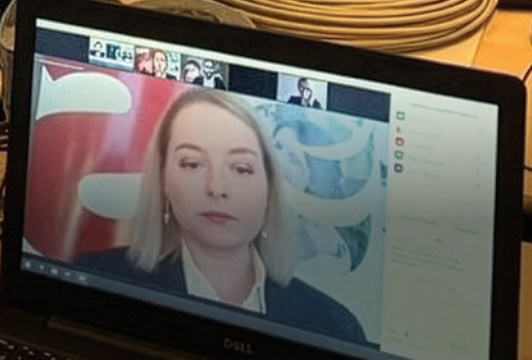
Train-the-trainer events are a cornerstone of the Angels education program. First put to the test in December 2017 in Wiesbaden, it has since been replicated around the world, recently undergoing a tactical change when the agenda was expanded to include practitioners of prehospital stroke care.

Doctors who have completed the training use Angels slides and learning resources for their own training presentations and workshops in their own hospitals and regions. A key advantage of the format is that it scales training delivery in a cost-effective way while maintaining consistency, but Angels Train-the-trainer events accomplish much more. They give a platform to bright spots in stroke care, and they grow and strengthen the Angels community, creating an ever-expanding cohort of professionals united in the fight against stroke.





 Jan van der Merve Angels Project Laird Europe, Germany	 Thomas Fischer Global Angels Project, Germany	 Lev Prystup Angels Initiative Consultant, UK
International Nurse Training 7 October 2020		
angels LEAVE A MARK. BE A LEGACY.		







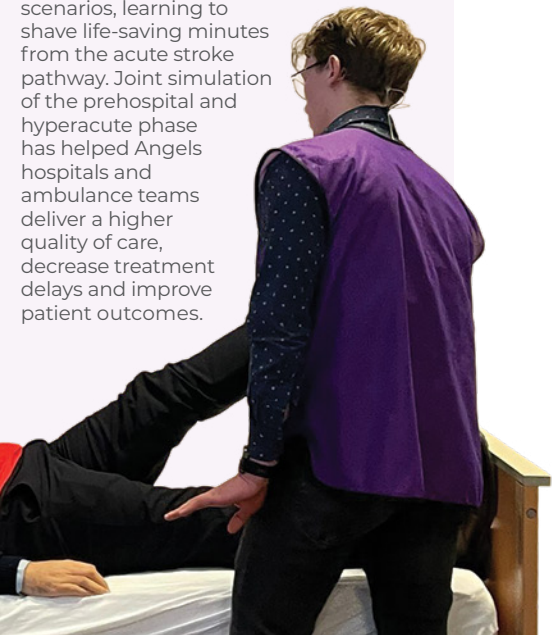
A safe place to learn

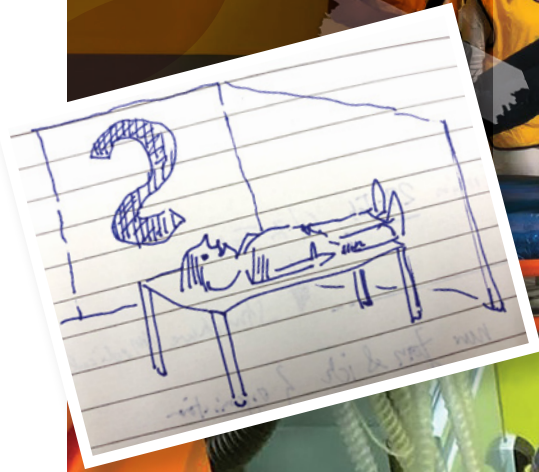
Pathway simulation is the key to reducing treatment times to improve patient outcomes.

It puts a magnifying glass over pathway performance, challenges perceptions, benchmarks performance, fosters multidisciplinary teamwork, instills belief in the potential for improvement, and encourages the adoption of new habits associated with the key priority actions.

In short, it 'puts out the welcome mat' for change.

The first Angels simulation took place in South Africa in 2017, conducted by a nervous novice team of 'experts'. Since then, countless stroke teams have benefited from role-playing decision-making and work-flow scenarios, learning to shave life-saving minutes from the acute stroke pathway. Joint simulation of the prehospital and hyperacute phase has helped Angels hospitals and ambulance teams deliver a higher quality of care, decrease treatment delays and improve patient outcomes.







When the Covid pandemic suspended in-person training in 2020, a shift to online learning helped sustain momentum. The online education offering became richer, growing into a e-learning platform for interactive online training, as well as comprehensive stroke education resources across a number of disciplines.

A steep rise in enrolment in the online Angels Academy mirrors the rising demand for online education worldwide, but it is also testimony to the Angels community's dedication to building knowledge in order to raise treatment standards.

At Dr Nurbakyt's hospital, the Mainz experience continued to pay dividends. A series of multidisciplinary simulations delivered important breakthroughs, and a program of standardized education using Angels online resources helped bridge knowledge and performance gaps.

"It's not just about saving people or giving them a normal life," Dr Nurbakyt told the younger doctors in her hospital. "It's about giving more time and moments of joy to families."

In Q3 of 2024, the hospital won the first of five consecutive diamond awards, and at ESOC 2025, Dr Nurbakyt took her place on the awards stage beside some of the best hospitals in Europe.

In January 2026, four districts in Aktobe province officially became the first four Angels Regions in Kazakhstan, and in all of Central Asia.





First simulation in South Africa, first Train the Trainer in Mainz.

A decade of winning

IF there was a leaderboard for Angels Awards, Pauls Stradins Clinical University Hospital in Riga, Latvia, would be right at the top, with 28 ESO Angels diamond awards and no end in sight.

They first put up their hand at the start of 2018 when they registered with Angels, and by the end of that year began a hot streak of diamond awards that would have been uninterrupted but for a missed data entry deadline in the summer of 2023.

Find something that works, and keep doing it, is how head of the stroke unit Dr Kristaps Jurjāns explains their extraordinary success.

The Angels Awards program is more than a tool for evaluating and rewarding performance. On the principle that “what gets measured gets improved”, the awards criteria align with actions proven to improve outcomes after stroke. They therefore serve as a checklist for stroke centers and stroke-ready hospitals, to help them identify and target opportunities for improvement.

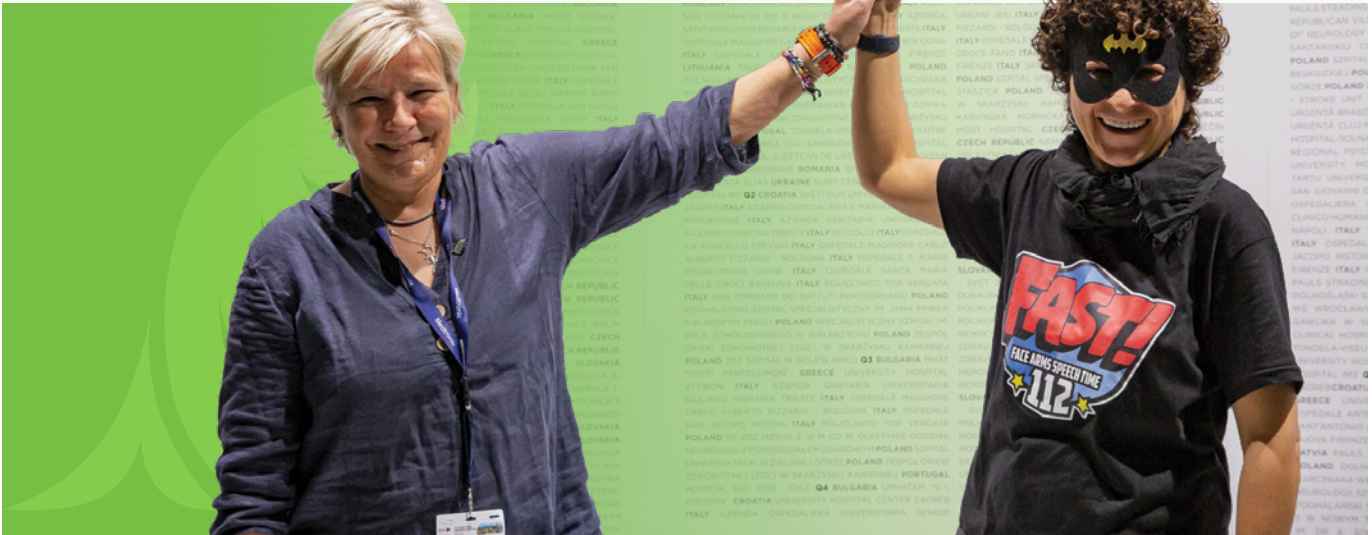
The Angels Awards bring the key components of stroke care into focus and make data collection integral to care, thereby creating the necessary conditions for quality monitoring. But they have also proved to be useful for removing roadblocks to transformation.

In Salta, Argentina, for example, neurologist Dr Gabriela Orzuza gave a masterclass in how public recognition can drive change and benefit patients. When Dr Orzuza first joined San Bernardo Hospital, there was no stroke team, no stroke

plan and no stroke treatment. There was also no vacancy for a vascular neurologist, so Dr Orzuza worked for free. Before being given a temporary appointment as instructor of neurology residents. She was officially appointed nearly a decade later after her hospital won a WSO Angels gold award, the honor making it uncomfortable for the provincial authorities not to do so.

A platinum award the following quarter gave her the institutional heft needed to establish a stroke unit at her hospital. When six months later, her stroke unit achieved WSO certification, she used the momentum to expand the hospital's stroke service to include thrombectomy.











Excellence is a habit

Like Dr Jurjāns, we subscribe to an Aristotelian concept of virtue which historian Will Durant summarized as follows: “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence is not an act, but a habit.” Nine-thousand awards in 10 years have shown that excellence is cultivated through regular, disciplined actions, and greatness is trained through daily habits and small, consistent choices.

We are proud to share the stories of diamond hospitals and of hospitals that have overcome obstacles to win their first award. But we also know it's the second and third and fourth award that really carry our mission forward.

Because consistency counts. And repetition defines character.









Our grand mission

In Ribeirão Preto in Brazil, one week after World Stroke Day 2024, a small child dialed 192.

“I am here with my grandma,” the little girl told the operator.

“I think a clot is attacking my grandma.”



Olga Tserklevich and her grandmother, Svitlana Ivanivna Tserklevich.

Martin's story

In the summer of 2023, Mr Martin Vishanov was teaching a computer lesson at Vasil Levski Comprehensive School in the Bulgarian city of Russe, when he began to feel dizzy. When he tried to sit down on his chair he crashed to the floor. Realizing Mr Vishanov was having a stroke, his class of third graders ran to find their class teacher, Mrs Diana Ilieva, who called 112. An ambulance arrived within 10 minutes and, after emergency treatment for stroke, Mr Vishanov was soon back at school.

Liam's story

11-year-old Liam Gelderblom, star goalkeeper at Brackenfell Primary School outside Cape Town, South Africa, was enjoying a sleepover with his Oumie in the farming village of Riebeeck West when he heard strange sounds coming from her room. Recognizing one of the symptoms of stroke, Liam alerted his mom Annouska, and an ambulance was quickly summoned to rush Oumie to a hospital in a nearby city.

Olga's story

In March 2021, 8-year-old Olga Tserklevich from Lviv in Ukraine was spending the afternoon with her grandmother, 71-year-old Svitlana Ivanivna Tserklevich. During their customary game of dominoes, Olga noticed Svitlana's face was drooping on one side, and she seemed unable to pick up the dominoes with her left hand. Olga not only recognized the symptoms of stroke, she also understood the importance of acting fast. She ran to alert her parents who called the local emergency service right away.







Class act

The little girl in Brazil, the third-grade class in Bulgaria, Liam from South Africa and Olga in Ukraine are among more than one million elementary schoolchildren on a Grand Mission to save the world, one grandparent at a time.

The FAST Heroes stroke awareness campaign relies on children's enthusiasm for learning and sharing to transfer knowledge about stroke to their parents and grandparents. It developed from three insights, namely that the population most likely to have a stroke didn't like to talk about it, that the first thing most people did when they had a stroke was ask their children for advice (and that in most cases the advice was wrong), and that in most cultures including Europe significant numbers of people over 50 spent at least several days a week caring for their grandchildren.

Children enrolled in FAST Heroes at their schools learn about the most common symptoms of stroke and the importance of calling an ambulance immediately if these symptoms appear.

Each child nominates two grandparents whom they will educate about stroke, a strategy that creates a direct communication channel to the primary audience and leverages the emotional connection between children and their grandparents. The secondary audience (the children's parents) gains knowledge through incidental learning which takes place in everyday life through observation, social interaction and problem-solving.

The success of the project owes much to a collaboration with SAFE president Prof Harriet Proios whose students at the University of Macedonia in Thessaloniki, Greece, provided the theoretical underpinning for a five-week school-based stroke education program that was classroom-ready, culturally adapted to children's interests, and optimized to make learning last.

In March 2021 a global initiative called 'The Grand Mission to save our Grandparents' was launched with the aim to educate one million children and their families around the world. That target was reached in 2025. A new target of two million children is in sight.







FAST! HEROES



There are superheroes all over the world including South Africa where Ivanechia Jooste (left) won Tanya's Teachers Award, and Ukraine where Dr Iryna Sheredko (above right) is one of several young neurologists supporting FAST Heroes implementation. In 2023, Slovak school girl Ninka Ivančiková's story about saving her grandmother earned her a standing ovation at the Spirit of Excellence Awards dinner in Munich (right).



In 2022, FAST Heroes became 'officially amazing'. The program earned a GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS™ title for its attempt to create the largest online photo album of people wearing superhero masks.





Honoring the rescuers



Eight minutes.

That's how long it took the medical rescue service of the Moravian-Silesian region to reach the address where a colleague's mother had suffered a severe stroke.

In Lisbon to collect an inaugural EMS Angels diamond award, prehospital stroke education pioneer Petr Jaššo remembered it exactly. His team spent 11 minutes on the scene and took just 14 minutes to reach the hospital where the stroke team had been prenotified. Thanks to this swift action, this very important patient was walking and talking within weeks, with the prospect of returning to her pre-stroke life.

In October 2021, nine of Europe's top ambulance teams converged on Lisbon, Portugal, where the first EMS Angels Awards for excellence in prehospital stroke care was a highlight at the annual conference of the European Society for Emergency Medicine (EUSEM). Encouraged by the impact the Angels awards program was having on intra-hospital stroke care, it had been decided to extend the awards programme

to emergency medical services, starting in Europe. Ultimately, the purpose of the awards was to ensure that the maximum number of stroke patients were correctly assessed, adequately supported, and rapidly distributed to an appropriate stroke centre, where prenotified stroke teams are ready to meet their treatment needs. By highlighting weaknesses that could be addressed with specific targeted actions, the EMS Awards would raise the standard of care.

By late 2025, nine had grown to 277 recipients of over 1,000 EMS awards, and paramedic Ferenc Molnár of the Hungarian National Ambulance Service (OMSZ) published his study of the impact of the EMS Angels Awards on prehospital stroke care in Hungary.



Slovakia's ZaMED's record of success in the EMS Angels Award is unbeaten and probably unbeatable.



Francisco Arande from Cordoba and Antonio Iglesias from Galicia, Spain, at the inaugural EMS Angels Awards in Lisbon.



IPSS Medical Rescue, diamond-winners from KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.





The Advanced Stroke Life Support (ASLS) curriculum became part of the Angels Academy in 2019, where it has so far been completed by almost 35,000 doctors, nurses and paramedics. Becoming an ASLS training provider requires hands-on practical training by ASLS certified trainers, on this occasion in Prague, in March 2023.



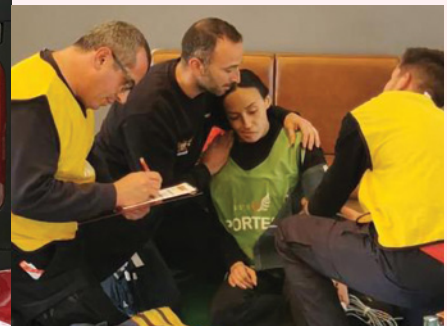
A different universe

Based on an analysis of over 80,000 cases, the study details OMSZ performance improvement in five key areas in the four years after it adopted the quality-improvement measures recommended by Angels, and expressed in EMS Angels Awards criteria.

Between January 2021 and December 2024, median on-scene time fell from approximately 21 minutes to 19, documentation of medication history rose from 29 percent to 99 percent, and onset-time recording reached nearly 100 percent after being made mandatory in 2023. Hospital prenotification improved from 11 percent to 97 percent, and direct transport to stroke-ready hospitals from 59 percent to 99,8 percent.

In 2023, Hungary became the first (and so far only) country in the world to reach diamond status in the EMS Angels Awards, in every one of its regions, a feat it repeated in 2024 and 2025.

Inside an ambulance car there was a different universe, Ferenc said. "Every time I work in the ambulance car, I feel better because I am doing something for society, for someone. It's good to be there. Every EMS worker feels the same way."





In 2023, Hungary became the first (and so far only) country in the world to reach diamond status in the EMS Angels Awards in every one of its regions, a feat it repeated in 2024 and 2025.







Matej Polák is director of ZaMED, Slovakia's leading provider of prehospital stroke care.

Nurses leading change



The Arrow Project team from Málaga. From left, Sergio González-Román, Almudena Fernández and Alvaro López in high spirits at the Spirit of Excellence award dinner in Munich.

IN 2017, an unprecedented project was implemented in hospitals across Europe.

A nurse-led intervention in Australia had shown a reduction in death and disability as a result of three simple protocols – to manage fever, sugar and swallowing – collectively known as FeSS. Now the aim was to replicate this impact in Europe.

Over the next four years, QASC Europe saw the Fess protocol implemented as part of routine stroke care in 64 stroke units across Europe. It not only fundamentally changed post-acute stroke care in Europe, it also changed perceptions of stroke nurses' role in hospitals,

and established the power of nurses to influence practice.

In 2018, three nurses at the Regional University Hospital of Málaga demonstrated that power after they were tasked with reviewing protocols in their newly refurbished stroke unit. The Arrow Project standardized post-acute stroke care via a system of color-coded arrows that are placed at the top of each patient's bed to help doctors, nurses and even porters easily identify the type of stroke

and side affected. Details of the treatment protocols for each day, such as regular checks for dysphagia, glycaemia and fever are accessed via a QR code.

In May 2023, the trio was celebrated in Munich, where an ESO Spirit of Excellence award nomination recognized their outstanding contribution to raising the standard of stroke care. At once simple and revolutionary, the project traveled well, eventually spreading to hospitals outside Spain where, the team from Málaga say, it was enriched by the contributions of other professionals.



QASC Europe champion Robert Havalda played a key role in supporting his fellow consultants throughout the project. Robert organised the Czech Republic's first Stroke Nurses Congress in 2019 and facilitated the establishment of an Angels Nurses Steering Committee in 2020.



QASC Europe was launched in 2017, led by Professor Sandy Middleton of the ACU Nursing Research Institute in Australia (fourth from left with Prof Valeria Caso).



From left, Sergio González, Juan Manuel López, and Joaquín García at ESOC 2025 in Helsinki.

Quality monitoring breathed new life into emergency nurse Cristina Riganti's career and catapulted two EMS centres in Tuscany onto the international awards stage.



The most beautiful sight

Nurses working in stroke units are people with huge hearts and amazing layers of empathy, says head nurse Ewa Gadzińska of St. Łukasz Hospital in Bolesławiec, Poland, from whom we received this moving account in 2023:

"We are constantly ready – every day, every minute, every second – so that when we get the news that a patient with suspected stroke is on their way, we can reach the tomography laboratory as soon as possible.

"We have a stroke bag which contains all the necessary medicines and equipment, and a second bag with additional equipment, which, contrary to appearances, is very heavy. When the stroke signal is received, there is sometimes a fraction of consternation: which way will be faster, the elevator or through the courtyard?"

"Then the nurse won't even notice if she is not properly dressed for the weather conditions. Sometimes she runs in the pouring rain, or in light shoes up to her ankles in the snow, the bag bumping around her ankles, so heavy she can barely carry it, because every minute is important. And she knows that her reward will be the most beautiful sight of a person smiling at us because of us."



Stroke champion Zasskia Wiese (right, with colleagues Sr Dineo Magasela and Mr Katlego Tabana) manages a trauma program and coordinates stroke care at a leading hospital network in South Africa.



Stroke nurses at St. Łukasz Hospital in Bolesławiec, Poland.





Nursing power in Andalusia.



Lessons in empathy

Mauro

The date is September 2023. The occasion, a hipster-chic wedding in one of the coolest wedding venues in Tuscany. It's a joyous occasion, a celebration of both love and life, but as far as the groom is concerned, two of the guests are more important than all the others – the woman who gave birth to him in 1987, and the one who 33 years later gave him a second chance.

Dr Angela Konze attends with her partner, emergency nurse Rita Marino, who was the first person

to see Mauro Carruccio when he was wheeled through the doors of Hospital Santa Maria Nuovo shortly after 7 am on 29 December 2020.

“Mauro was brought to the hospital by the EMS,” Rita says. “They called ahead to let us know they were bringing a young man with leftside hemiparesis whose last time seen normal wasn't known. I immediately activated the stroke pathway for a case of wake-up stroke.”

With 25 diamond Awards, Hospital Santa Maria Nuovo is one of the leading stroke centres in Europe. Within a year of enrolling with

Angels in 2018, it doubled its recanalisation rate, reduced its door-to-needle time by half and collected Italy's first diamond award. Since then the bright spot at Hospital Santa Maria Nuova has continued to spread its light.

Fully recovered thanks to their quick action and swift decision-making, Mauro is a regular participant in workshops and training meetings. The story of his second chance now has a new twist as he and his wife Julia Mete recently welcomed a baby girl. Happy endings like theirs is what the Angels mission is about.



Mauro Carruccio on his wedding day with Rita Marino and Dr Angela Konze.



Stroke survivor George Scola arrives at the southernmost tip of Africa after a 2,500 km walk.

George

When SAFE president Harriet Proios says, “Every stroke survivor who turns their struggle into strength for others are my heroes,” it’s people like George Scola she’s thinking of. The South African entrepreneur was 37 when, on an ordinary Saturday morning in April 2008, he found himself in the back of an ambulance hurtling towards an entirely unpredictable future.

Disabled as a result of his stroke, and with his business in ruins, George had one more thing to lose and he did. After his divorce, he founded the Stroke Survivors Foundation, and set off on a 2,500 km walk from South Africa’s northern border to the coast to raise awareness and funds.

George co-authored the Global Stroke Bill of Rights that was launched at the World Stroke Congress in Istanbul in 2014. He was elected to the WSO board in 2016.

“Surviving stroke is the easy part,” he says. “You either do, or you don’t, and while you’re in hospital you are looked after and receive all the care you need. But the day you’re discharged, it changes. That’s when our lives as stroke survivors begin.”



For Rocío González Gutiérrez (far right), participating in a pathway simulation triggered feelings of grief, nervousness and fear.

Rocio

Rocío González Gutiérrez, an accountant from Borges Blanques in the province of Lleida, Spain, suffered a hemorrhagic stroke at 32, five days after giving birth to twin girls Valme and Paula.

Following her discharge from the University Hospital Arnau de Vilanova, she underwent multiple therapies but when state funding dried up 18 months later, Rocío was still a wheelchair user with right

hemiplegia preventing the use of her right arm and hand. She now walks with difficulty, and struggles with memory, logic and calculations.

In 2025, almost 12 years after her stroke, Rocío found herself on a stretcher being wheeled once more through the corridors of Hospital Arnau de Vilanova. This time, however, she was wearing a red vest labeled “patient”, signaling that she was taking part in a simulation intended to identify gaps in the intrahospital pathway.

It’s just one of the ways in which Rocío contributes to stroke care transformation in her region.

Although the simulation triggered feelings of grief, nervousness and fear, she would do it again in a heartbeat.

Stroke has taught her that there are wonderful people, Rocío says. “You have to fight, but there is life after stroke – and the small details, those we sometimes don’t give importance to, become very beautiful moments.”

Making the world safe for stroke



It was a big night for a small city when Sapucaia do Sul in Brazil officially became the world's second Angels City.

A NEW chapter in the story of Angels began three years ago in Ribeirão Preto, a medium-sized city located in São Paulo state, Brazil, a four-hour car ride inland of the state capital. On World Stroke Day 2023, it became Brazil's first Angels City, laying the foundation for a new strategic approach, and a bold new plan to make the world safe for stroke.

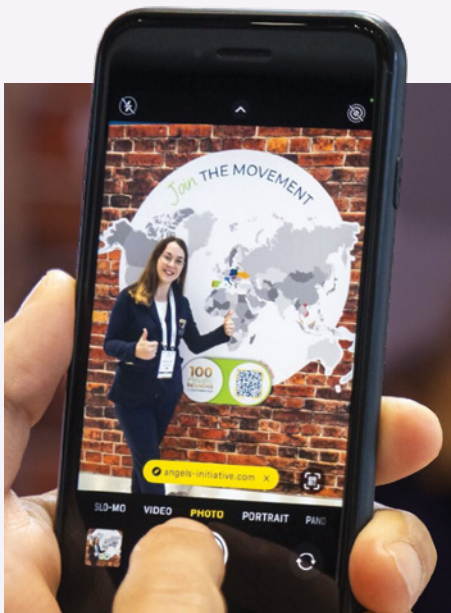
The Angels Regions strategy arose out of the realization that the stroke patient's journey begins and ends in the community, not in the ambulance or in the emergency ward. The stroke chain of survival therefore depends on a collaborative effort between

patients, family members, and healthcare professionals including EMS, to optimize delivery at every stage of the journey.

This means: an informed public able to recognize the symptoms of stroke, emergency transport to the right hospital, acute treatment

that meets the highest standard, and finally, a discharge system that supports the patient's reintegration into the community.

The concept is powered by the fact that it sets one goal to be achieved by everyone: If one doesn't do it, then no-one can do it.



In Khmelnytskyi Oblast, Ukraine, a celebration like no other as Dr Dmytro Lebedynets led the community on a walk through the patient's journey.



A regional celebration for Kielecki and Sandomiersko Jędrzejowski regions in Poland. Marta Solnica (center) heads up the EMS that is the biggest data contributor to RES-Q in Poland. Their consistency, dedication and patience deliver results that inspire others.

100 Angels REGIONS

by DECEMBER 2027

All for one

The idea that for one to succeed, everyone must succeed, became the rallying cry for the 100 Angels Regions strategy, formally announced to the global stroke community at ESOC 2024 in Basel, Switzerland, and again at the World Stroke Congress in Abu Dhabi, with an invitation to “join the movement”. The goal was to convert 100 Angels Regions by December 2027.

As the project gathered momentum, we recorded many firsts – the first Angels Region in Europe (Almería in Spain), the first Angels Region via telestroke (Ituverava in Brazil), the first capital city to become an Angels Region (Riga in Latvia), the first island (Madeira in Portugal), and the first Angels Region in South America (Del Reloncaví in Chile).

Pictures received from every corner of the world – Argentina to Malaysia, Ecuador to Vietnam – demonstrated that it takes a community to become an Angels Region, and a community to celebrate it.

We now know that becoming an Angels Region benefits communities beyond stroke. It turns out that getting local authorities in the same room with teachers and healthcare professionals creates opportunities to talk about issues that concern everyone, and to commit to actions that are in the interests of everyone.

To no-one’s surprise, we overshot the target in February 2026 and began to imagine entire countries where public awareness, EMS partnerships and acute hospital care are all optimized to deliver better outcomes for stroke patients . . .

By the time you read this, you could be living in an Angels Region yourself.



At the regional celebration in Kielecki, with her friend, school director Miss Wikło, is Spirit of Excellence Award winner (2020), Dr Małgorzata Fudala, Poland’s “fourth Angel”.



Team Italy planning for success.





Angels Region celebration in Hungary

Sheer joy as Del Reloncaví in Chile becomes the first Angels Region in South America.



Angels Region celebration in Almería, Spain

Building community

Italy, 2017

Neurologist Dr Rossana Tassi had just returned to the University Hospital of Siena after studying at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm. Eager to share her new knowledge with her community, she began a journey of change at her hospital and throughout the regional referral network. It started out well, with significant reductions in treatment times, but after a year, support lagged and performance began to slide.

Enrolling with Angels connected Dr Tassi to consultant Lorenza Spagnuolo, now Angels team leader for Western Europe, who helped the hospital update its treatment processes and further improve treatment times through

multidisciplinary workshops and simulation training.

No longer alone, Dr Tassi said: "When Lorenza comes, I can fight again, because there is someone standing beside me."

Soon, as a result of their partnership with Angels, the hospital began to feel part of something bigger than themselves – "almost as if we were the 'Angels' within our region," Dr Tassi said. "We were reminded of how significant our daily work was and how impactful we had been."



Italy, 2017.



ESOC memories with Lola Beltrán, Rita Rodrigues and Anton Tolmachev.







Fransisca Elisabet of Indonesia on booth duty at ESOC2024.



United Arab Emirates, 2024

At the World Stroke Conference in Abu Dhabi, Jan van der Merwe witnessed a vivid example of the power of the Angels community. He had run into Dr Chrissi Tunkl, a German neurologist who, in her free time, supports the Nepalese stroke community. She was looking for advice and support for expanding her educational efforts there.

Jan had just spoken with Dr Claudio Jiménez from Colombia who, with his government's support, enrolled nearly 19,000 nurses and thousands of doctors and paramedics in training on the Angels website. He introduced Chrissi to Claudio and his compatriot Dr Angel Corredor, and watched the magic of the Angels community unfold.

Claudio told Chrissi about encouraging new treating hospitals in Colombia to create their own communities inside the hospital, and showed her examples of how he mentored these "hospital communities" from a distance. Inspired by this idea, Chrissi called the Nepalese delegates over to meet Claudio and to learn how to apply these strategies in Nepal.

Jan reports that an impromptu workshop then formed around a small table next to the Angels booth – serving as a reminder that when we unite around a common goal, stroke care transcends individual efforts and becomes a collective mission through which challenges are transformed into shared victories, positive change, and hope.

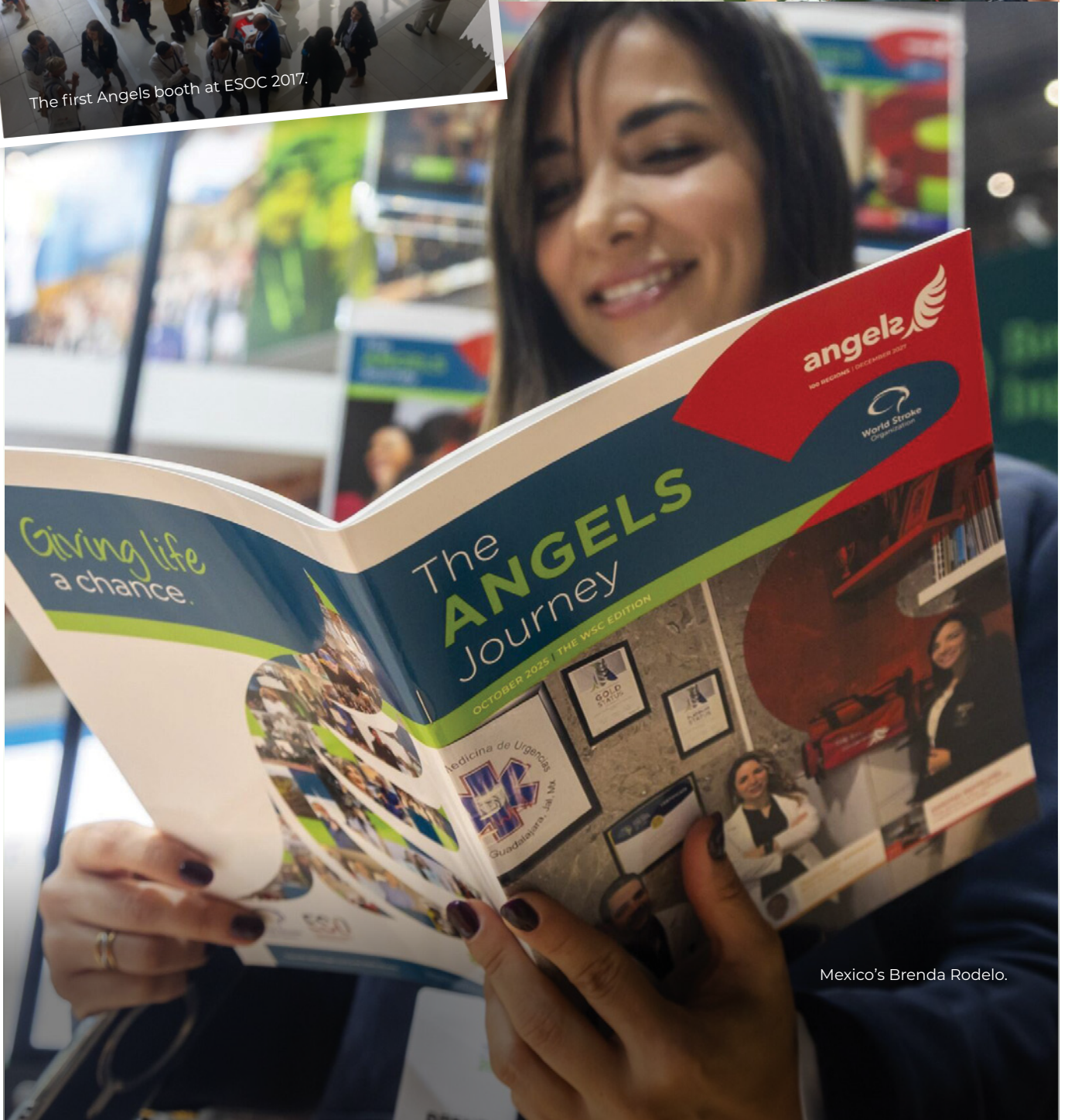


Jan van der Merwe with Dr Martina Chovancová from Slovakia.





The first Angels booth at ESOC 2017.



Mexico's Brenda Rodelo.



Ukraine, 2025

When choosing a venue for the get-together where the three districts of Khmelnytska Oblast would celebrate becoming Ukraine's first Angels Regions, one of the chief requirements was a sturdy and capacious bomb shelter. Though Khmelnytskyi was located in the west of the country, the war had been edging closer. There was nevertheless a great deal to celebrate.

When the 100 Angels Regions strategy was launched at the start of 2024, the Angels team in Ukraine knew that their regional conversion process would have to address the needs of a population fractured and exhausted by two years of Covid and three years of war.

In Khmelnytska Oblast, the pandemic and then the war had worn away at the connections that bind a society together, and across the region people were struggling with exhaustion from air alerts disrupting their sleep and their work.

The consultants set out to rebuild a community in which everyone felt supported – by the authorities, by Angels and by each other.

Working methodically, they identified the main challenges and drew up an action plan for each, then broke it down into an integrated program of scheduled meetings, training interventions and follow-ups. Their goals were to create a community of hospitals, cooperate with local health and educational authorities, instill a culture of teamwork in the region – and for everyone to achieve it together.

March 6, 2025 brought joyful news from Ukraine as Khmelnytska Oblast was formally recognized as a community willing to fight every day for excellence in stroke care. But it had achieved something even more profound and worthy of celebration: The campaign to become an Angels Region had strengthened their community with the knowledge that even in the darkest moments they could count on each other.

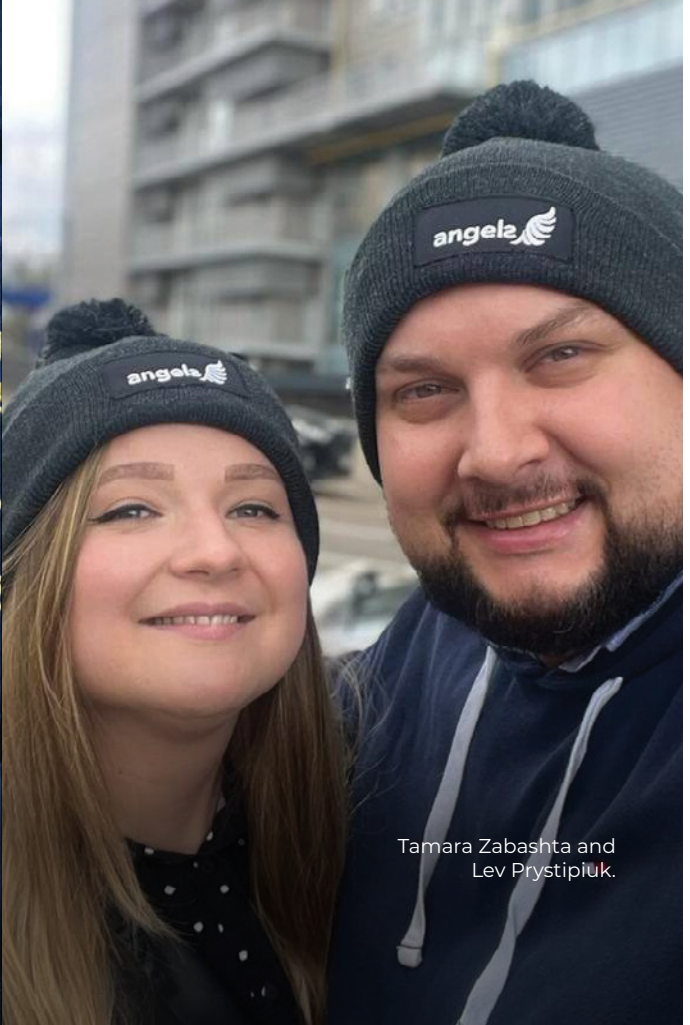


Ukraine, 2025.





From left, Rita Rodrigues, Katarina Moulinet, Robert Havalda and Silvia Ripamonti.



Tamara Zabashta and Lev Prystiuk.



Consultant Maria Shverdina on Red Dress Day in Croatia, with Prof. Zdravka Poljaković.



On 3 March 22, one week after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Angels consultant Maria Sheverdina's youngest daughter Varja turned 10. They were sheltering in an office building in Kharkiv. Instead of the special birthday Maria had been planning, there were balloons they had discovered in one of the rooms, handmade presents from the other children in the shelter, and a cake the other moms had fashioned out of kiwi fruit. After 10 days underground, Maria and her family escaped from the shelter in an ambulance and crossed the border to safety.



ти ознаки інсуляту
ети правильну лікарню
не транспортування
нта
сьне попередження
тної команди

1. Завчасне попередження ШМД
2. Доставка пацієнта безпосередньо на КТ
3. Експрес тести лабораторних показників
4. Лікування пацієнта безпосередньо на КТ



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 2. Internal capsul
 3. Basal ganglia sig
 4. Insular ribbon sig
 5. Swelling (Sulci/Mid

We had joy,
we had fun.









Giving life a chance.



ANGELS
Stroke HEROES

Inspiring the global
stroke community

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