



THE US Review of Books

REVIEW HIGHLIGHT:

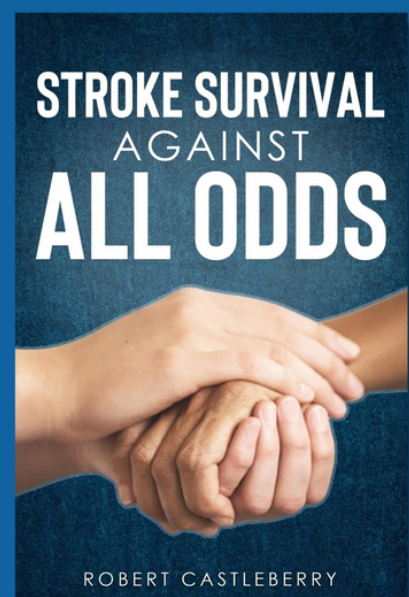
Castleberry's book is concise and informative, creating an environment that allows readers to relate to the author while simultaneously providing tools they can use directly in the face of such tenuous circumstances.

STROKE SURVIVAL: AGAINST ALL ODDS

by Robert Castleberry

Reviewed by:

MIHIR SHAH



Stroke Survival: Against All Odds

by Robert Castleberry

"The brain works in mysterious ways in trying to communicate with affected limbs."

Too often, society lives in a "it can't happen to me" bubble. Yet when it does, lives are thrown into chaos and uncertainty. Experiencing a stroke is arguably one of the major chaos-inducing conditions simply due to the varied nature of a stroke and the palpable fear that will naturally arise. In Castleberry's fusion of memoir and guide map, he demystifies many of the confusing elements that plague unsuspecting families of loved ones that are learning how to pick up the pieces and provides, perhaps most importantly, a path of hope that illustrates how even a new normal can be fulfilling and provide a strong quality of life.

The memoir opens up with a trip to Angel Fire, New Mexico, for a fun-filled family ski trip. A hard fall where the author's wife, Beverly, hits her head becomes the catalyst for exacerbating headaches that she had already been feeling. Because stroke symptoms share numerous characteristics with other, more benign conditions, their precursors are tough to spot. However, the images of Beverly in the restroom, unable to get her words out properly, and her face drooping are trademark stroke symptoms. As the author so aptly frames it, the three-hour window after a stroke occurs is vital to the outcome and overall patient recovery, which is why there are a myriad of different results following a stroke.

The author makes it abundantly clear that right from the onset of the stroke patients experience some level of brain fog and will have difficulty remembering their post-stroke journey. Digging deeper, Castleberry sheds light on the importance of going beyond the world of medicine and stepping into the innate faith in the Lord and sheer willpower, which is what it will take to regain any sense of normalcy in one's life. In the memoir, this willpower is instrumental in Beverly's month-long rehab at St. Pat's, where keeping the mood light and focusing on movements of the affected limbs evolved into memorable and refreshing scenes of humor between Beverly and the author.

While there are over eight different types of strokes, the two most common ones tend to be ischemic and hemorrhagic strokes. In both cases, there are drastically different outcomes with what one is able to do, and for this reason, Castleberry emphasizes the need for impeccable documentation. In his case, he candidly accounts for every aspect of Beverly's road to recovery, including, but not limited to, visitors, small milestones of progress, etc. As the work progresses, Castleberry provides a great deal of transparency about how to handle the post-stroke financial aspect, especially regarding the functional necessity of a case manager from both the insurance provider and the hospital. They are your strongest advocates and can help facilitate a smoother transition and understanding of arcane terminology, as well as prevent an already traumatizing experience from becoming a logistical financial nightmare.

Moreover, the author conveys that hurdles will appear in one form or another as the patient shows signs of recovery. On an individual level, demanding physical and occupational therapy sessions and possibly even speech therapy will be crucial in regaining lost skills, but even once those thresholds are crossed, returning to work, as was the case with Beverly, can become frustrating and difficult. The world of work that she left behind before her stroke was starkly different, forcing her to navigate through another host of obstacles to gain what was rightfully hers. Overall, Castleberry's book is concise and informative, creating an environment that allows readers to relate to the author while simultaneously providing tools they can use directly in the face of such tenuous circumstances.