“The right side of your brain is bleeding,” my doctor said, as he admitted me into the hospital in the summer of 1996.

That morning, I had been teaching a class of nursing students. By that afternoon, I was a stroke patient with slurred speech, difficulty thinking and left-side paralysis.

As a registered nurse, I had practiced and taught psychiatric nursing for 37 years. I knew that expressing your feelings and inner thoughts could help change your outer circumstances. Holistically, I also knew that there is a healing power within each of us that is greater than our condition.

So, along with fully participating in my medical, nursing and rehabilitation program, I also integrated affirmations, self-love, meditation, creative visualization, deep breathing and relaxation techniques as well as writing into my healthcare plan.

1. **Affirmations:** These are positive thoughts, words or statements that you say, think or write in the present tense. They help you to achieve your goals.

   Affirmations helped me to stay focused on my desire to walk, talk and think clearly again. As I affirmed, “I am in the process of healing now,” my consciousness shifted to ‘I am now recovering’ from ‘I’ll never recover.’

   When I had a disempowering thought such as, ‘I am just a stroke victim now,’ I empowered myself by affirming, “I am more than this stroke.”

   When I couldn’t move, I affirmed, “I easily and comfortably move my left leg and arm.” When I slurred my speech, I affirmed, “I speak clearly now.”

2. **Self-Love:** Love is an empowering experience, even though loving yourself as a stroke patient can feel threatening. However, loving yourself during an illness can make you feel valued and help increase your self-esteem.

   Each morning and evening, I affirmed, “I love myself, exactly as I am,” and soon, I began to feel less devastated. This affirmation helped to increase my self-worth. I also affirmed, “I forgive myself for having a stroke,” because forgiveness is also part of loving yourself.

3. **Meditation:** Meditating is calming and can help you cope. It can help you transcend your pain and achieve a more
peaceful state, which is essential to stroke recovery. Meditating helped me to relax and deal with my inner chaos and physical and emotional pain. It offered me quiet time to sort out my feelings of fear and despair and helped me cope more effectively. Meditating in the morning helped me face the day; at night, I slept better.

4. **Creative Visualization:** This is a technique that helps you use your imagination to manifest your goals. You mentally rehearse seeing yourself easily handling difficult situations in an attempt to conquer them.

Before a physical therapy session, I imagined myself re-learning how to climb up and down stairs until I accomplished this goal. And, even though today I still walk down stairs slowly, I water-walk quickly in a local pool and I enjoy walking.

Sample visualization: “Imagine yourself walking on the beach and then going into the water and jumping waves. Take a deep breath. Now, as you walk out of the water and onto the sand, the pain and fear leaves your body. You start to feel peaceful, knowing that walking and climbing are now easier for you.”

5. **Deep Breathing and Relaxation Techniques:** These techniques help you to decrease your stress. And since stress is related to illness and can negatively affect your emotions, practicing stress-reduction techniques is invaluable for your health because it helps you deal with frustration.

I realized that stress was interfering with my physical and emotional health. I began to practice deep breathing and relaxation techniques throughout the day in order to decrease my stress and help me feel peaceful. It also lowered my blood pressure.

Sample relaxation process: Close your eyes and take three long breaths and relax. Next, gently tighten and relax each set of muscles. Breathe, and focus on peace within. Now, imagine that your blood pressure is being taken. You feel relaxed as the numbers keep getting lower. Take another deep breath and open your eyes.

6. **Writing about an Illness:** Writing is therapeutic. It helps you express your innermost feelings, offers you insights and promotes health.

Initially, it was difficult for me to speak or articulate my thoughts. My husband gave me a journal and encouraged me to write about having a stroke.

At first, I could only write, ‘cry.’ Then, I wrote, ‘must cry.’ Finally, I wrote, ‘I feel so sad.’ And, then I cried and began to release my emotional pain about having a stroke.

**Affirmations**

I comfortably practice holistic techniques.
I heal from without and from within.
I love myself now.
I am thankful for my recovery.
I am relaxed.
I am peaceful.
I cherish my independence.
I love and thank my caretaker.
Meditating keeps me centered.
Creative visualization helps me reach my goals.
Expressing my feelings is safe.
Writing about my illness is healing.

I encourage you to use writing as a way to express your thoughts. If you cannot write, perhaps, you can talk into a tape recorder. If you can’t do that, your caregiver can help you express what you’re feeling. They may say, “I know that you feel frightened.” You can indicate yes or no, and they record your thoughts.

Recovering from stroke will be a life-long process. There’s always another level of health to strive for. I’ve had a remarkable recovery. I’m happier, calmer and healthier, and I feel whole again. I’ve returned to teaching and I’m writing a book about my recovery titled *A Bold Stroke: Healing from Within,* to share with survivors, caregivers and healthcare professionals. This has helped me to recapture part of being a nurse again.

If I were your nurse, I would encourage you to follow your health plan and also integrate some of these techniques into your life. We’re all capable of creating miracles. I’m still creating mine. ☮