

Singing therapy helps stroke patients

By Richard Knox, GPB News

Debra Meyerson was hiking near Lake Tahoe 15 months ago when a stroke destroyed part of the left side of her brain, leaving her literally speechless. It happens to more than 150,000 Americans a year.

But now Meyerson is learning to talk again through an approach that trains the undamaged right side of her brain to “speak.” Specifically, it’s a region that controls singing.

For more than 100 years, it’s been known that people who can’t speak after injury to the speech centers on the left side of the brain can sing.

In the 1970s, Boston researchers started to use a sort of “singing therapy” to help stroke survivors speak again.

However, it never caught on much perhaps because a lot of therapists, not to mention patients, weren’t comfortable singing what they wanted to say. And back then, the science wasn’t advanced enough to show the actual changes in the brain that result from the therapy.

That’s changing fast.

Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, who has had a version of “singing therapy,” astounded everyone by her ability to speak again albeit so far in single words and short phrases. Nearly a year ago, a would-be assassin’s bullet tore through the speech center in Giffords’ left brain.

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