For many people with Parkinson’s disease, the right medication can make a world of difference, and the number of available medications continues to grow. But for some patients, medication has little effect. Fortunately, a specialized treatment called deep brain stimulation (DBS) can make all the difference for the right candidates.

Mary Brown was one of them – and her gratitude for her Mercy neurologist and neurosurgeon, and DBS treatment knows no bounds.

“I praise Dr. Hamilton and Dr. Henderson every chance I get,” she says with deep feeling. “They are the reason I am alive today. Thanks to them, I have been given my life back.”

Now 60, she was about 50 when she started noticing symptoms that eventually led to her diagnosis two years later.

“First, I lost my sense of smell,” she says. “Every once in a while I’ll get a whiff of something, but that’s about it. Then I started to notice that my left pinky would go spastic when I was typing.”

That small tremor eventually spread to her hand, her arm and the entire left side of her body, followed by the right side. After an already heartbreaking year (during which two of her favorite uncles, her father, and her boss and mentor all passed away), she was diagnosed with Parkinson’s in 2008 by Randall Hamilton, M.D., a neurologist with Mercy Ruan Neurology. She was 52.

“I truly believe my disease progressed faster than normal because of all the stress of that year,” she says.

Dr. Hamilton tried several different medications but none alleviated her rapidly worsening symptoms. By 2014, she says, “I looked like a 100-year-old woman. I could barely speak, and I had pain and fatigue 24/7 from cramping and tremoring.”

Dr. Hamilton suggested she might be a candidate for DBS, a treatment that involves implanting a small device, similar to a pacemaker, which sends electrical signals to the brain to reduce symptoms and improve quality of life. Esminalda Henderson, M.D., joined the staff at Mercy Neurosurgery in 2013, and is the only fellowship-trained neurosurgeon in central Iowa, specializing in deep brain stimulation, who performs the complex surgery.

After two two-step procedures to insert and program the devices on each side of her brain—two brain surgeries and two battery implants in 2014—Mary saw incredible improvement.

Once barely able to walk, she is now living independently and loves having her grandchildren visit. Once almost unable to speak, she can barely contain herself when asked about her doctors.

“Dr. Henderson did her residency with the man who invented DBS!” she exclaims. “She is meticulous, kind-hearted, patient and positive—just an absolute delight. We are so lucky to have her here in Des Moines.”

She has just as much gratitude for Dr. Hamilton, who is still part of her care team.

“He’s very straightforward, kind and compassionate, as well as an excellent communicator,” she says. “Over the years, we’ve developed a doctor-patient friendship and I know he really cares about me.”

She is eager to share her story of recovery in hopes of raising awareness of the benefits of DBS.

“I look at my diagnosis as a blessing,” she says. “We are put here on Earth to help other people, period. By speaking at support groups, and telling my story of PD and DBS to anyone who’s interested, I can show people there is hope. And since the window of when you can have the surgery can be quite small, I want to reach as many people as I can. I owe it to God to pay it forward.”

For more information on DBS and Mary Brown, visit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1LLVzQCL6Ec.