



**Sam Schmid**, an Arizona college student believed to be brain dead and poised to be an organ donor, [miraculously recovered](#) just hours before doctors were considering taking him off life support.

Schmid, a junior and business major at the [University of Arizona](#), was critically wounded in an [Oct. 19 five-car accident in Tucson](#).

The 21-year-old's brain injuries were so severe that the local hospital could not treat him. He was airlifted to the [Barrow Neurological Institute](#) at St. Joseph's Medical Center in Phoenix, where specialists performed surgery for a life-threatening aneurysm.

As hospital officials began palliative care and broached the subject of organ donation with his family, Schmid began to respond, holding up two fingers on command. Today, he is walking with the aid of a walker, and his speech, although slow, has improved.

Doctors say he will likely have a complete recovery. He even hopes to get a day pass from the hospital to celebrate the holidays with his large extended family.

"Nobody could ever give me a better Christmas present than this -- ever, ever, ever," said his mother, Susan Regan, who is vice-president of the insurance company Lovitt-Touche.

"I tell everyone, if they want to call it a modern-day miracle, this is a miracle," said Regan, 59, and a Catholic. "I have friends who are atheists who have called me and said, 'I am going back to church.'"

Schmid's doctor, renowned neurosurgeon [Dr. Robert Spetzler](#), agreed that his recovery was miraculous.

"I am dumbfounded with his incredible recovery in such a short time," said Spetzler. "His recovery was really remarkable considering the extent of his lethal injuries."

Hospital officials are crediting Spetzler with having a "hunch" that despite an initially dire prognosis, the young man would make it. But he said it was "reasonable" for others to consider withdrawing the patient from life support.

"It looked like all the odds were stacked against him," said Spetzler, who has performed more than 6,000 such surgeries and trained the doctor who [operated on Congressman Gabrielle Giffords](#) after she was shot at the beginning of this year.

During surgery, Spetzler clipped the balloonlike aneurysm in the blood vessel -- "as if I were patching a tire," a procedure that eventually worked.

For days Schmid didn't seem to be responding, but what puzzled his doctor was that he did not see fatal injuries on the MRI scan. So he decided to keep Schmid on life support longer.

"There was plenty wrong -- he had a hemorrhage, an aneurysm and a stroke from the part of the aneurysm," Spetzler said. "But he didn't have a blood clot in the most vital part of his brain, which we know he can't recover from. And he didn't have a massive stroke that would predict no chance of a useful existence."

So while the family was given a realistic picture of Schmid's poor chances for survival, Spetzler ordered one more MRI to see if the critical areas of the brain had turned dark, indicating brain death.

"If not, we would hang on and keep him on support," he said. "But I didn't want to give the family false hope."

Schmid's mother said no one "specifically" asked if her son would be a donor, but they "subtly talk to you about quality of life."

"At some point, I knew we had to make some sort of decision, and I kept praying," said Regan.

The MRI came back with encouraging news during the day and by evening Schmid "inexplicably" followed the doctors' commands, holding up two fingers.

"It was like fireworks all going off at the same time," said Spetzler.

Today, Schmid -- his speech clear and sounding upbeat -- told ABCNews.com, "I feel fine. I'm in a wheelchair, but I am getting lots of help."

See video and read full story here: <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/arizona-accident-victim-emerges-coma-poised-donate-organs/story?id=15208351>