

STROKE AWARENESS MONTH

Being Stroke Smart

by Peter C. Fung, MD

By the time you finish reading this article, someone will have died from a stroke. Every year, more than 790,000 Americans are affected by stroke, which is three times more frequent than the incidence of breast cancer. Stroke can affect anyone at any time; older adults, middle-aged adults, children and even newborns are all susceptible and there are 50,000 more women with stroke than men each year.

Stroke is the fourth leading cause of death in this country. It is the leading cause of long-term disability, often leaving its victims paralyzed, unable to care for themselves or communicate with family members. The emotional and financial toll on the patient, family and society is enormous. During Stroke Awareness Month in May, we can all become 'stroke smart' and learn about the signs and symptoms of stroke and how to help ourselves or loved ones who may be having a stroke.

Knowing the Symptoms

Stroke symptoms vary depending on the site of involvement and the severity of the stroke, and they usually appear quickly. The most typical symptoms include:

- Weakness or numbness on one side of the body
- Face drooping on one side
- Problems speaking or understanding
- Trouble seeing, blurred vision, double vision, visual field loss or even complete loss of sight
- Dizziness or loss of balance
- Severe headache without an apparent cause

When stroke symptoms occur, time is the essence to seek medical attention in order to prevent long-term complications or even death. Often people wait to see if the symptoms will go away or call their friends, family or physicians to verify the symptoms. If you are experiencing or see someone experience them, the best course of action is to immediately call 9-1-1. In Santa Clara County we have a well-developed Emergency Medical Service (EMS) system that can bring the stroke victim to a facility capable of providing prompt and appropriate evaluation and effective treatment.

At a hospital, a stroke team will conduct a comprehensive evaluation including a brain scan, EKG, labs and neurological evaluation to ensure effective treatment can be administered without delay. These treatments may include intravenous or intra-arterial tPA (a clot dissolving medication), thrombectomy, antiplatelet medications and others, so as to limit or reverse the stroke deficits, but also to start treatment programs to reduce the chance of stroke worsening and recurrence.

At both El Camino Hospital's Mountain View and Los Gatos campuses, acute stroke teams of specially trained doctors and nurses are prepared to help patients suffering from stroke. Specifically, we have seven board-certified neurologists and a physician certified in Vascular Neurology (Stroke).

Being Stroke Smart (cont'd)

Our Mountain View campus has been a Joint Commission Certified Primary Stroke Center since 2005. Every two years, we pass the most rigorous accreditation survey. We have received the Gold-Plus Award from the American Heart/Stroke Association 4 years in a row and we have been recognized by HealthGrades with both the Stroke Care Excellence Award™ for 2013 and ranking in the Top 10% in the Nation for Treatment of Stroke. This year, our Los Gatos campus became a Santa Clara County EMS Stroke Receiving Center with similar capabilities.

Not just in May but every month, it's important to be stroke smart and remember that stroke is a treatable disease. Remember that Time Lost is Brain Lost. Every second counts when a stroke occurs so quick action might save you or someone you love.

For more information on our Stroke Program, please contact our program coordinators:

Mountain View:

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Los Gatos:

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