

TO MEDIA:
CONTACT PERSON: Robin Jennings,
Director, Communications
Excela Health
724-837-1781 TEL
724-516-4483 CELL

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**EXCELA HEALTH OFFERS STROKE PRIMER
DURING NATIONAL STROKE MONTH**

GREENSBURG, PA, May 11, 2010 ... What is stroke? Simply put, a stroke or cerebrovascular accident (CVA) is defined as a sudden disruption to the supply of blood to the brain. According to Michael Sauter, MD, neurologist on staff at Excela Health, this can be the result of two things: a blood clot or other blockage in an artery keeps blood from reaching the brain, thus causing a stroke; or a blood vessel bursts, causing a hemorrhagic stroke. "When blood, and the crucial nutrients and oxygen it carries, can't reach the brain, brain cells can quickly die, leaving permanent damage."

About 750,000 Americans have strokes each year, and 150,000 of them will die as a result. There are approximately 5.7 million stroke survivors in the United States today, many of whom have suffered permanent disability caused by their stroke.

"A stroke may seem like something that only happens to older people who are in ill health or have heart disease," commented Dr. Sauter. "But in reality, stroke can affect many different people and have a wide range of effects on their health, life and physical and mental abilities.

There are many perceptions or myths relating to stroke that can be misleading:

MYTH- Stroke is not preventable.

REALITY – Up to 80% of strokes are preventable.

MYTH – Stroke cannot be treated.

REALITY – Stroke requires emergency treatment. The quicker, the better.

MYTH – Stroke only strikes the elderly.

REALITY – Anyone can have a stroke.

MYTH - Stroke happens in the heart.

REALITY – Stroke is a “Brain Attack”

MYTH – Stroke recovery ends after six months.

REALITY – Stroke recovery can last a lifetime.

Although stroke is the third most frequent cause of death in the United States, preceded only by heart attack and cancer, the good news is that nearly 80 percent of strokes can be prevented if people make lifestyle choices that help them maintain good health.

STROKE: KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS

First and foremost, it is important to know the warning signs of stroke:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body.
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding.
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes.
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause.

Should any of these symptoms occur individuals should follow the Stroke Act F.A.S.T. initiative which highlights the above symptoms on what to look for and how to respond by calling 911.

STROKE: RISK FACTORS

Some stroke factors can be controlled; others can't. Key risk factors to be aware of:

Age – The chance of having a stroke more than doubles for each decade of life after age 55.

Gender – The incidence of stroke is about equal for men and women. More than half the total stroke deaths occur in women. African Americans are affected by stroke more often than any other group.

Heredity – Incidence of stroke is greater in someone who has a family history of stroke.

Prior Stroke – incidence is greater for someone who already has had a stroke verses someone who has not.

Other Health Conditions – High blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, heart disease, atrial fibrillation and sickle cell anemia are all factors that increase the risk for stroke.

“By managing, monitoring and routinely having these conditions checked you can lower your risk for stroke” noted Dr. Sauter. “It is also important to take prescribed medications and follow instructions carefully. You and your doctor can work together to prevent or treat these conditions and formulate a treatment plan.”

Lifestyle Behaviors – Smoking cigarettes, eating a diet high in fat and/or sodium, being obese, and not getting enough good exercise can all increase stroke risk.

“Healthy lifestyle factors and choices are very instrumental in preventing stroke,” emphasizes Dr. Sauter. “Basically it’s following good common sense – eating healthy, maintaining appropriate weight, staying active, avoiding smoking and limiting alcohol consumption.”

STROKE: EARLY TREATMENT

Every second counts when restoring blood flow to the brain because with every second lost, more brain cells die. “Fast interaction is key in treating stroke, thus early recognition of stroke symptoms is crucial – the sooner treatment is given, the better,” noted Dr. Sauter. “Time Lost is Brain Lost!”

One of the best treatments for blood clots – the cause of ischemic strokes – is tissue plasminogen activator, or t-PA, a clot-busting drug that works quickly to dissolve a clot and restore blood flow to the brain. But it must be given within

the first few hours after symptoms start. While t-PA is not appropriate for people who suffer a hemorrhagic (bleeding) stroke, about 80% of strokes are caused by ischemic strokes (blood clots).

Anti-clotting medications and other blood thinners may also be given to people who have had an ischemic stroke to help reduce the risk of another blood clot forming. Emergency surgery may also be done to open a blocked artery or repair a burst blood vessel. A special tool, called a MERCI Retriever, may be introduced into an artery through the groin and threaded to the brain to the site of the clot. This special surgical tool is designed to engage, capture and remove a blood clot, thus restoring blood flow.

STROKE RECOVERY:

Stroke survivors often face an uphill battle when it comes to recovery. Fifty percent of stroke survivors will suffer from disabilities that prevent them from completely taking care of themselves and their daily needs.

Complications that may follow stroke include communication problems involving both language comprehension and speech. Stroke survivors may also experience paralysis on one or both sides of the body, as well as loss of control over their muscles. Swallowing may be difficult, memory problems and loss of memory are also common, as are pain and numbness throughout the body.

Often patients need to undergo various therapy programs to overcome these limitations. Services are provided through Excelsa Health's Barclay Rehabilitation and Neuroscience centers. A full range of services in physical, occupational, and speech therapies, social services and stroke education are available.

The impact of a stroke can be monumental for both patient and family. Recovery can be frustrating and exhausting and a loved one may be forced into the unfamiliar position of being dependent on others for things they once did themselves. "Try to be accepting and as forgiving as possible. Simplify daily activities and seek help from others. Support groups for caregivers can be just as helpful as for stroke survivors themselves," Dr. Sauter added. "By staying

positive and getting the support they need and learning as much as they can about their condition, patients are better able to reduce risk of a future stroke or heart attack.”

COMMITMENT TO CARE

Excela Health is committed to providing quality care for area stroke patients. US News and World Report has recognized Excela Health as a Center of Excellence for stroke care through the American Stroke Association’s Get With the Guidelines- Gold Plus Performance Award for achieving success in implementing a higher standard of stroke care by ensuring that stroke patients are treated according to evidence–based guidelines.

To learn more, visit www.excelahealth.org, or contact Excela Health’s Call Center, 1-877-771-1234.