

# HEALTHY HEART NEWS

Volume 5 | May 2016 *Beverly Keefer, Director of Cardiovascular Services / Mehul Patel, Medical Director of SLCH Cardiovascular Institute*

St. Luke's Cornwall Hospital's Cardiovascular Institute is committed to you and our community. We pride ourselves on being an engaged partner with the many constituencies that we serve. As part of our commitment to meeting your heart health needs, we have developed this quarterly newsletter filled with information that can improve the quality of, and in some cases, help save your life. If there are topics that you would like to see covered in future editions, please e-mail Beverly Keefer, Director of Cardiovascular Services, Cardiac Cath and Interventional Radiology at [bkeefer@slchospital.org](mailto:bkeefer@slchospital.org).

## MAY IS STROKE AWARENESS MONTH

While strokes threaten millions of lives, they are largely preventable, treatable and beatable. This month is dedicated to educating people about the signs, symptoms and risk factors, as well as the F.A.S.T. method of recognizing the warning signs of stroke.

### Some facts about Strokes in the United States —

- Stroke is the fifth leading cause of death for Americans.
- Stroke kills almost 130,000 Americans each year—that's 1 out of every 20 deaths.
- On average, one American dies from stroke every 4 minutes.
- Every year, more than 795,000 people in the United States have a stroke. About 610,000 of those are first or new strokes.
- About 185,000 strokes—nearly one of four—are in people who have had a previous stroke.
- Stroke costs the United States an estimated \$34 billion each year. This total includes the cost of health care services, medications to treat stroke, and missed days of work.
- Stroke is a leading cause of serious long-term disability.
- High blood pressure, high cholesterol and smoking are major risk factors for stroke. About half of Americans (49%) have at least one of these three risk factors.

### EARLY ACTION IS IMPORTANT FOR STROKE

Know the warning signs and symptoms so that you can act fast if you or someone you know might be having a stroke. The chances of survival are greater when emergency treatment begins quickly.

In a recent survey, 93% of respondents recognized sudden numbness on one side as a symptom of stroke. However only 38% were aware of all major symptoms and knew to call 9-1-1 when someone was having a stroke. It is important to call the ambulance so that medical personnel can begin life-saving treatment on the way to the emergency room.

Patients who arrive at the emergency room within three hours of their first symptoms tend to have less disability after three months than those who received delayed care.

Friends and families usually save friends and families from stroke by acting F.A.S.T. and noting the time when any symptoms first appeared.

F	A	S	T
Face Drooping	Arm Weakness	Speech Difficulty	Time to Call 9-1-1

### Additional signs of a stroke may include:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arms or legs, 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, lack of balance or coordination
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause



One of the major causes of stroke is high blood pressure. About one out of every three adults in the United States — 67 million people — have high blood pressure. Many people have high blood pressure and do not know it. That is why it is called the silent killer, and why it is important to have your blood pressure checked. If you know family or friends who have not had their blood pressure checked recently, make it a point to ask them to do it this month of May!

## WHAT IS A TIA?

A Transient Ischemic Attack (TIA) is a transient stroke with symptoms that last less than 24 hours. It occurs when the blood supply to part of the brain is briefly interrupted. TIA symptoms which usually occur suddenly are similar to those of stroke but do not last as long.

### SYMPTOMS OF A TIA

- Numbness or weakness in the face, arms or legs, especially on one side of the body
- Confusion, difficulty talking or understanding speech
- Trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Difficulty walking, dizziness, or loss of balance and coordination

### Is there any treatment?

There is no way to tell whether symptoms are from a TIA or an acute stroke so patients should assume that all stroke-like symptoms signal an emergency and not wait to see if they go away. A prompt evaluation (within 60 minutes) is necessary to identify the cause of the TIA and determine appropriate therapy. Depending on a patient's medical history and the results of a medical examination, the doctor may recommend drug therapy or surgery to reduce the risk of stroke in people who have had a TIA.

### What is the prognosis?

TIAs are often warning signs that a person is at risk for a more serious and debilitating stroke. About one-third of those who have a TIA will have an acute stroke sometime in the future. Many strokes can be prevented by heeding the warning signs of TIAs and treating underlying risk factors.

Medical help is available to reduce and eliminate the factors that cause strokes or TIAs. Lifestyle changes such as eating a balanced diet, maintaining healthy weight, exercising, and enrolling in smoking and alcohol cessation programs can also reduce these factors. Reducing high blood pressure can lower your risk for stroke and heart attack.

### GET WITH THE GUIDELINES

SLCH received a fifth "Get With the Guidelines Gold Plus Performance Achievement Award" from the American Stroke Association. Hospitals achieve this award for implementing specific quality improvement measures outlined by the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association for the treatment of stroke patients. SLCH has met specific quality achievement measures for the rapid diagnosis and treatment of stroke patients at a set level for a designated period. These measures include aggressive use of medications and risk-reduction therapies aimed at reducing death and disability and improving the lives of stroke patients.

