



Fall 10-23-1997

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Recommended Citation

University Communications, Illinois Wesleyan University, "'A Deadly Mystery" Public. Awareness Program Hikes Public Knowledge in Twin Cities Of the Warning Signs of Stroke" (1997). *News and Events*. 5935.
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/5935>

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October 23, 1997

locals, Chicago,
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"A Deadly Mystery"
**Public Awareness Program
Hikes Public Knowledge in Twin Cities
Of the Warning Signs of Stroke**

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--A sweeping public awareness campaign focusing on the warning signs of stroke is scoring positive results with Bloomington-Normal residents.

A random survey of 1,216 people in the Twin Cities by the Central Illinois Neuroscience Foundation, Illinois Wesleyan University students, and members of the BroMenn Regional Medical Center reveals only 22 percent of respondents could not name a single telltale sign of a stroke or brain attack. An initial canvass five months earlier reported 43 percent of those polled couldn't name one stroke warning sign.

"The second survey," CINF said, "revealed a dramatic increase in public knowledge of stroke warning signs compared to the first survey.

"Moreover," CINF added, "it appears from the results of the second survey that the age groups most susceptible to stroke listened to the stroke team's message. For example, in the first survey, of the people in the age groups of 55-65 and 66-75, 66 percent and 38 percent, respectively, could not name a single warning sign. This dropped in the second survey to 41 percent and 24 percent, respectively.

The survey also revealed that women were outstripping men in their knowledge of the warning signs of stroke. The second survey revealed 81 percent of female respondents knew at least a single warning sign of stroke, compared to 67 percent in the first study.

Wayne Dornan, IWU associate professor and research director for the Normal-based Central Illinois Neuroscience Foundation, described results of the second survey as "very good news," adding that "as new treatments are

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available the only way that a stroke team can be successful is if people recognize the warning signs and get to the hospital as soon as possible if they are having a stroke."

Fewer than one-quarter of stroke victims seek medical treatment within three hours of suffering a stroke. One reason for this, according to CINF, is that many people don't recognize the warning signs. In fact, the National Stroke Association has labeled stroke as "a deadly mystery for many Americans."

Stroke Stats

Annually, hundreds of people in the Bloomington-Normal community are victims of strokes. About one-third of stroke victims, according to CINF, will die while two-thirds probably will be disabled with upward of half of survivors unable to return to work.

There are about 600,000 new strokes annually nationwide, which kill 200,000 victims and forever change the lives of the other 400,000 survivors, CINF reports.

Stroke is the third leading cause of death in the United States and the leading cause of adult disability. With an increasing elderly population, some estimates put stroke as the second leading cause of death nationwide.

Illinois ranks No. 6 in deaths caused by cerebrovascular disease, according to a 1995 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services study with 7,488 people reported to have died because of a stroke. Illinois' death rate is 63.3 per 100,000 people, compared to the national average of 60.1.

What Is a Stroke?

The most common form of a stroke occurs when blood circulated to the brain is decreased by a blood vessel blockage. Brain cells can die from decreased blood flow.

Traditionally, stroke management has involved providing, in general, only patient support care. However, major medical achievements during the last decade--for example, improved diagnostic imaging techniques and the successful clinical trials of thrombolytic therapy--conventional stroke treatment is being replaced by aggressive intervention.

Even the traditional term--stroke--has been superceded by the term--

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brain attack. This terminology likens brain attacks to heart attacks, requiring immediate emergency assistance to stem fallout, which can include paralysis and loss of the ability to speak.

New Stroke Treatments

Based on animal studies, it appears that a therapeutic window exists, ranging from three to six hours, following a stroke. Consequently, patients can benefit considerably if treatment is started before the end of this six-hour window. However, patients frequently don't arrive at hospital emergency rooms within this time frame.

Earlier this year, a new locally based stroke team launched a program to spur public awareness about strokes, their warning signs, and consequences.

Last February, a three-week survey was conducted by stroke team members from CINF, BroMenn Regional Medical Center, and IWU students. A sample of 1,314 individuals was randomly selected and interviewed by telephone, probing their knowledge about stroke warning signs.

Survey results revealed 43 percent did not know a single stroke warning sign.

"At that time," Dornan explained, "we knew that if we were going to have a successful stroke program that considerable education would be needed in order to increase the public's awareness of the warning signs of stroke. We decided that a major community awareness program was desperately needed."

Community Awareness Campaign

A major community awareness campaign about the warning signs of stroke was launched in March in cooperation with stroke team members.

The effort involved radio, television, and newspaper interviews by various stroke team members. It also featured public seminars, including a June 13 session with a trio of leading authorities on stroke, Alzheimer's, and Parkinson's Disease from the Indiana University medical school faculty, who outlined the latest research breakthroughs and latest treatments for those debilitating central nervous system maladies.

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"Although we are encouraged by the results of the public awareness campaign," said Ann Stroink, a Bloomington-Normal neurosurgeon, CINF co-founder, and a 1976 IWU biology graduate, "we still have approximately one-quarter of our sample not knowing what a warning sign is.

"Our job," Stroink added, "will focus on continuing stroke education to our community, as well as emphasizing early arrival at the emergency room."

CINF is a 38-member non-profit organization founded last year to promote research and education of physicians, health-care professionals, and the public about neurological diseases. CINF, IWU, and BroMenn Regional Medical Center of Bloomington-Normal are part of a landmark study testing the effectiveness of a new clot-busting drug aimed at treating a certain type of stroke.