



GAUTENG PROVINCE

HEALTH
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MEDIA STATEMENT

SUNDAY, 29 OCTOBER 2023

PUBLIC URGED TO SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ATTENTION WHEN NOTICING STROKE RELATED SYMPTOMS

The public has been urged to seek immediate medical attention when noticing stroke related symptoms such as sudden weakness on the face, arm or leg and it is mostly on one side of the body.

This comes as countries observe World Stroke Day today (29 October) to raise awareness on the disease which claims approximately 60 lives every day in South Africa. The good news is, stroke does not have to be a death sentence as there is treatment available in the public health sector.

If blood flow to the brain is blocked or there is sudden bleeding in the brain, a stroke can happen. There are two types of strokes. An ischemic stroke which is a stroke that happens because blood flow to the brain is blocked while a hemorrhagic stroke occurs when there is sudden bleeding in the brain.

Symptoms of stroke include the sudden onset of numbness of the face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body; confusion, difficulty speaking or understanding speech; difficulty seeing with one or both eyes; difficulty walking, dizziness and/or loss of balance or coordination; severe headache with no known cause and fainting or unconsciousness.

Prof Mandisa Kakaza, the Head of Neurology at Steve Biko Academic Hospital (SBAH) and University of Pretoria said that people need to be informed about strokes, how they present and how they get treated.

“It is very important that we educate the public about the symptoms of strokes so that they can present early to their nearest health facilities for diagnosis and early treatment. This can improve the stroke outcome.

“The main thing that is always worrying about stroke patients is that when they start noticing the neurological deficit, they always think that it is going to get better on its own. Some, particularly amongst Black Africans, would believe that they have been bewitched. This has to stop, people need to present at their local hospitals for treatment,” said Kakaza.

The chances of acquiring a stroke increases with age and people who have high

blood pressure (hypertension) and diabetes stand a higher risk of getting the disease. However, most young patients who present with stroke at health facilities have auto-immune diseases where the body attacks itself or they might be having heart diseases which form clots which block vessels on the brain.

The effects of behavioural risk factors of strokes may show up in individuals as raised blood pressure, raised blood glucose, raised blood lipids, being overweight and obesity. These risk factors include an unhealthy diet, lack of exercise, tobacco use and harmful use of alcohol, and it is important for people with chronic illnesses such as high blood pressure or diabetes and high cholesterol to take treatment regularly to reduce the risk and prevent strokes.

SBAH's stroke unit is the first and only internationally accredited stroke unit in South Africa. The hospital was recognised in 2022 and awarded the Diamond Stroke Award by the International European Stroke Congress for how it has improved the management of stroke patients.

The Stroke Unit at the hospital has state-of-the-art equipment and advanced technological devices such as cameras linked to the cellphones of clinicians to alert them on the status of patients and Nintendo Wii games which are used as part of physiotherapy for stroke patients. It also has a rapid software that allows the unit to assess and give treatment to patients up to nine hours after the onset of a stroke.

Ends

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