



GAUTENG PROVINCE

HEALTH
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MEDIA STATEMENT

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PUBLIC URGED TO PRIORITISE STROKE PREVENTION AND EARLY TREATMENT

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), stroke is one of the leading non-communicable diseases (NCDs) contributing to high mortality rates globally.

In Gauteng, the trends are particularly significant due to the province's high population density and urban lifestyle, both of which contribute to the risk factors associated with stroke.

The province has seen a noticeable increase in stroke cases in recent years, with thousands of new cases reported annually across the province's hospitals. In the 2023/24 financial year alone, approximately 7,991 new stroke patients were treated in physiotherapy departments within public hospitals.

This growing prevalence can be attributed to several factors, including an aging population and a high incidence of lifestyle-related health risks such as hypertension, diabetes, obesity, and high cholesterol. Additionally, the high levels of stress and limited physical activity associated with urban life are contributing factors specific to Gauteng.

With National Stroke Week (28 October to 3 November) underway, the department has emphasised on the importance of awareness, prevention, and early treatment of stroke to curb this trend.

“Recent figures from the department show a worrying number of stroke cases across several of the province’s major healthcare facilities. Tembisa Provincial Tertiary Hospital reported the highest number of new stroke patients with 1,250 cases treated in the physiotherapy department during 2023/24 Financial year, followed closely by Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital with 1,069 new stroke patients, and Helen Joseph Hospital with 755 new cases.

“Collectively, tertiary, and central hospitals have the bulk of new stroke cases, with over 4,200 patients seen across these facilities. These

numbers underline the critical need for public awareness and quick medical intervention,” explained Gauteng MEC for Health and Wellness, Nomantu Nkomo-Ralehoko.

The most important steps in combating stroke is recognising the early signs and symptoms. GDoH encourages residents to remember the FAST acronym: Face drooping on one side, Arm weakness, Speech difficulties, and Time to seek emergency medical help. Other symptoms include sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes, dizziness, lack of coordination, and a severe headache. Immediate medical intervention is critical to minimise the impact of a stroke, and the hospitals are equipped to provide rapid treatment.

“Stroke is often linked to lifestyle diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, and high cholesterol. Factors such as poor diet, high salt intake, limited physical activity, smoking, and excessive alcohol consumption contribute to these conditions, raising the risk of stroke and other serious health issues,” stated MEC Nkomo-Ralehoko further pointing out that the department advocates for preventive measures to lower the risk of stroke, including maintaining a healthy diet and regular exercise while limiting salt and processed foods. Avoiding smoking and limiting alcohol intake further reduces risk, and routine health screenings for blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels help detect warning signs early.

For stroke patients’ recovery is possible, and with timely treatment, many regain independence and quality of life. Survivors are encouraged to engage in physiotherapy, often available at their local hospitals, to regain mobility and strength.

GDoH remains committed to reducing the stroke burden through public education and awareness, and by strengthening emergency response and treatment capabilities in health facilities.

Meanwhile, in 2022 Steve Biko Academic Hospital (SBAH) became the first and only internationally accredited stroke unit in South Africa. The hospital was 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 SBAH boasts 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.

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Issued by the Gauteng Department of Health

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