



PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

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**TO: ALL MEDIA**

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## **STROKE AWARENESS WEEK**

6-12 June is Stroke Awareness Week. Strokes are a major cause of disability and death in South Africa. 9 out of every 100 deaths among women are due to stroke. In men 5 out of every 100 deaths are due to a stroke.

A stroke can be described as a brain attack. A stroke occurs when a blood vessel supplying oxygen and nutrients to the brain gets blocked or bursts. The part of the brain that is starved of oxygen is then damaged. Strokes are not always fatal. Some strokes are very slight (these are known as TIAs-Transient ischaemic attacks). Others can cause serious disability. Once you have had one stroke - either a light or a severe one - you have a high chance of suffering another stroke.

The risk of having a stroke is higher as you get older or if you have one or more family members with any disease of the heart and blood vessels, diabetes or high blood pressure. There are also high risk factors such as smoking tobacco products, being overweight, drinking excessive alcohol and not taking steps to correct blood pressure, diabetes and high cholesterol. People with heart disease and infections like HIV and AIDS, syphilis and TB also have a higher risk of a stroke.

The most common cause of a stroke is a blood clot (thrombosis). This is related to hardening of the arteries as a result of old age, smoking, excessive alcohol intake or various infections. Another cause is a build-up of fatty deposits inside the arteries. This may block the arteries. A third cause is the bursting of a blood vessel in the brain. This normally results in a severe stroke.



The signs and symptoms of a stroke are weakness, numbness or paralysis (lameness) of the face arm or leg on one or both sides of the body, sudden blurring or decreased vision in one or both eyes or suddenly experiencing double vision, difficulty speaking or understanding speech, dizziness, loss of balance or any unexplained fall or unsteadiness while walking, headaches (usually severe and sudden) or unexplained changes in the pattern of headaches.

### **Minor Stroke (TIA)**

- Temporary weakness and/or loss of feeling in an arm or leg - or both.
- Visual disturbance. This may be temporary or permanent loss of vision in one eye. There may also be loss of vision in both eyes or double vision.
- Speech disturbances including loss of speech.
- Balance disturbance.

Other signs include: Disorientation - you are not aware of where you are, restlessness, decreased ability to pay attention, difficulty in understanding what people say, forgetfulness, emotional difficulties, such as anxiety or mood swings.

### **How can it be prevented?**

A stroke must always be treated as an emergency - even a minor stroke. Take the person to a doctor or hospital immediately. Prevention involves targeting those risks that can be changed:

- Get treatment for hypertension, diabetes and other diseases.
- Stop smoking and alcohol misuse.
- Seek treatment for severe infections, like tuberculosis.
- Loose weight (if you are overweight) and increase exercise levels.
- Adopt a healthy diet.

### **ENDS**

**For more information please contact Mrs Lindiwe Khuzwayo on 083 393 9943**