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Stroke Awareness Month: The New Jersey Neuroscience Institute Raises Public Awareness About Risks of Stroke and its Symptoms

Edison, NJ (April 23, 2009) -- It strikes out of the blue. It alters lives forever. A stroke, unlike a heart attack, usually causes no pain. So the warning signs are often missed -- until the day you collapse. This scenario will happen to approximately 780,000 Americans each year, according to the American Stroke Association.

This May, in recognition of Stroke Awareness Month, the New Jersey Neuroscience Institute (NJNI) at JFK Medical Center is committed to raising public awareness about the full continuum of stroke by helping the community better manage risk factors of a stroke, recognize the signs and symptoms of stroke, understand stroke response and improve the quality of life during stroke recovery. This annual event aims to arm members of our community with the knowledge they need to "Save a Life" of a person experiencing a stroke.

But the good news is that just about 80% of strokes can be prevented!

High blood pressure is the number one cause of stroke. Moreover, there are other controllable factors that can contribute to and increase stroke risk including high cholesterol, diabetes, smoking, alcohol consumption, obesity and heart disease. It is important to consult with a physician to monitor your blood pressure and the on-going impact of these risk factors.

A stroke is the number one cause of disability in the United States. Its warning signs are easy to miss, notes Martin Gizzi, MD, PhD, FAHA, Chairman of the NJNI. "But they typically begin with asymmetrical symptoms, such as sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg on one side of the body. However, many do not seek medical care right away. If they did, then stroke might not be the third leading cause of death." Unfortunately, many people, unaware they are having a stroke, simply wait for the symptoms to go away. It is crucial to remember that every moment counts in the event of a stroke. With the number of annual strokes increasing, there is an even greater need for public education about the symptoms and the urgency of seeking treatment for this oftentimes silent killer.

Learning the signs of stroke can save precious time and brain function. The American Stroke Association declares, 'time lost is brain lost.' In many cases, patients who experience stroke are not the ones who recognize the symptoms. It is important that everyone -- family, friends and co-workers -- learn the signs and symptoms of stroke, Dr. Gizzi points out. If you or someone you are close to is experiencing stroke-like symptoms, think: **HALT the stroke**.

H – Head: severe headache or neck pain (especially if it is the worst of your life, or first of your life), facial weakness, facial numbness, vision loss

A – Arm: Weakness, numbness, clumsiness

L – Leg: Weakness, numbness, difficulty walking, unsteadiness

T – Talking/Time: Speech difficulty, slurred, word finding difficulty, time is critical – remember three-hour window

“Recognizing and responding to the warning signs as soon as they appear gives the patient the best chance for optimal recovery with medical treatment,” Dr. Gizzi adds. Every hour an individual delays treatment means increased brain cell death, which could lead to increased disability or death. If you develop any of these stroke symptoms, don’t wait and call 911 right away!

The NJNI is recognized as a leader in stroke treatment. It is designated by the state of New Jersey as a Comprehensive Stroke Center, is certified by the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, and is ranked among the top 5% of Stroke Centers in the United States and holds a five star rating from HealthGrades, the nation’s leading independent healthcare quality company. Such achievements signify that the services provided have the critical elements to achieve long-term success in improving patient outcomes.

The NJNI will once again kick off Stroke Awareness month with a series of free seminars. Dr. Gizzi and our expert neurologists and stroke nurses will be on hand to help educate yourself and your family on stroke signs and symptoms and talk about what you can do to reduce your risk for stroke. Light refreshments will be served and free giveaways distributed to participants.

Do You Know the Warning Signs of Stroke?

Fewer than one in five Americans can recognize the signs of stroke. JFK wants you to be on “stroke alert.” Attendees will be provided with a general overview of stroke signs and risk factors of a stroke.

Date: **Tuesday, May 12, 2009**
Time: 6:00 p.m.
Location: JFK Conference Center (across the street from main hospital)
70 James Street, Edison, NJ

Sleep Apnea & Stroke

Untreated, sleep apnea can be life threatening and appears to put individuals at risk for stroke and transient ischemic attacks (TIA’s, also known as “mini-strokes”). Come to this informative seminar to learn more!

Date: **Friday – May 15, 2009**
Time: 12:00 – 1:00 p.m.
Location: JFK Medical Center – Auditorium
65 James Street, Edison, NJ

Stroke Information Booth

Stop by the Stroke Informational Booth and learn everything you can about strokes! Participants will have the opportunity to receive free stroke screenings, blood pressure screenings and assessments.

Date: **Wednesday – May 13, 2009**
Time: 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Location: JFK Medical Center - Front Lobby
65 James Street, Edison, NJ

Ask the questions you want answered. Allow us to arm you with the information you need to make a difference. ***To register for our free seminars or to learn more about the services and programs offered through the New Jersey Neuroscience Institute at JFK, please call Florence Chukwunke, RN, BS, Neurovascular Nurse Clinician at 732.321.7000, ext. 61800.***

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