

# The Miami Times

## Primary Stroke Center: What it Means to You?

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### Primary stroke center: What it means to you?

If you notice a sudden change in your vision or maybe one of your arms or legs feels heavy, numb or weak – you may be having a stroke. The signs of a stroke may include the sudden onset of one or more of the following symptoms:

- Numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg
- Confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Trouble walking, dizziness or loss of balance or coordination
- Trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Severe headache with no known cause

Recognizing the symptoms of a stroke and seeking prompt medical care can greatly improve your chances of recovery.

Every 40 seconds in the United States, someone has a stroke, and about every three to four minutes someone dies as a result of a stroke. This makes stroke the third leading cause of death in the United States. About 5.1 million Americans are stroke survivors, yet many of them have serious, long-term disabilities.

#### EARLY CARE IS IMPORTANT

When someone is having a stroke, they need prompt emergency medical care. During a stroke blood supply to the brain is cut off or disrupted, causing part of the brain to go without the oxygen-rich blood it needs. The longer the brain goes without blood, the greater the chance a

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# Reacting quickly when recognizing a stroke

## STROKE

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disability will occur.

The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS) conducted a five-year study on the use of tissue plasminogen activator (tPA), a clot-busting drug. The study found that patients who received tPA within three hours of the first stroke symptoms were at least 30 percent more likely to recover with little or no disability after three months. When a person is having a stroke, doctors must first determine whether the stroke is caused by a clot (ischemic stroke) or by a ruptured blood vessel (hemorrhagic) before tPA can be used. This is because tPA can only be used for ischemic strokes, which account for about 87 percent of all strokes.

### IMPROVING CARE

The Brain Attack Coalition, a group of 14 national organizations including the American Academy of Neurology, the American Association of Neurological Surgeons, the American College of Emergency Physicians, the American Society of Neuroradiology and the American Stroke Association, developed joint recommendations for hospitals

to create stroke care centers as a way to improve the quality of care for stroke patients.

The concept for the stroke care centers is similar to that of a trauma center combining the resources of a number of specialties to quickly evaluate and treat patients with complex medical needs. Like a trauma center, the stroke center team works closely with local emergency medical services so that proper care can begin before the patient arrives at the hospital.

The stroke team includes physicians such as neurologists or neurosurgeons who specialize in the care of strokes. Nurses from the hospital's emergency department or intensive care centers also are part of the stroke team. The team is available around the clock to respond when a patient with stroke symptoms comes to the hospital.

The goal of a stroke team is to promptly assess the patient's condition and order the tests needed to diagnose the type of stroke involved. The team also works to stabilize the patient's blood pressure, heart rate and other vital functions. If the tests show that the patient's stroke is the result of a blood clot blocking a vein in the brain, then tPA can be given to help break up the clot. The team's

goal is to begin tPA within three hours of the first symptoms of a stroke.

After receiving appropriate emergency care, a stroke patient is to a stroke unit. The stroke unit has the equipment in place for continuous monitoring of the patient's condition.

### BENEFITS OF A STROKE CENTER

According to the Brain Attack Coalition, hospitals with stroke centers have shown improved treatment times for stroke care and better patient outcomes.

"We've found that using the stroke center approach helps us diagnose and treat strokes more quickly," said Manny Linares, CEO of North Shore Medical Center. "We use evidence-based medicine to establish written protocols for stroke care that are designed to improve patient care and quickly get them the care they need. These protocols have been shown to reduce the number of stroke-related complications, which lead to improved quality of life for our patients."

North Shore Medical Center's stroke program has been awarded certification from the Joint Commission as an Advanced Primary Stroke Center.

To learn more about stroke care, call us at 305-835-6000.