

Increasing Stroke Awareness in May

May 2007 - In 1989 the National Stroke Association received the Presidential Proclamation recognizing May as National Stroke Awareness Month. The goal of this annual campaign is to raise public awareness about stroke risk factors, prevention, symptom recognition and acting fast to treat stroke.

Carteret General Hospital is committed to raising awareness and preventing stroke, the third leading cause of death in the United States, behind heart disease and cancer. Stroke is also the leading cause of long-term disability in the US.

A stroke is a “brain attack” cutting off vital blood and oxygen to the brain cells that control everything we do- from speaking, to walking, to breathing. Most strokes occur when arteries are blocked by blood clots or by the gradual build up of plaque and other fatty deposits. Some strokes can be caused by arteries rupturing when weak spots in the blood vessel walls break.

North Carolina, along with coastal Georgia and South Carolina, has twice the mortality rate from stroke as compared to the nation. The CDC has identified a “Stroke Belt” in the southeastern US where incidence is higher than the rest of the country. A “buckle” of this belt is in coastal Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina where mortality is double the rest of the country.

Carteret General Hospital is participating in both the North Carolina Stroke Registry and the American Heart Association’s “Get With the Guidelines” program to collect data on all of their stroke patients and benchmark it against the rest of the state and the country. These programs will also help Carteret General insure that the best care is being provided to all stroke patients.

Risk factors for stroke are similar to those for heart attack. Risk factors that can be controlled include:

- High blood pressure (the most important risk factor)
- High cholesterol
- Diabetes
- Obesity
- Lack of exercise
- Smoking

Treatment for a stroke can be more effective if given early on. Every minute counts! Call 911 immediately if you or someone you are with has any of the following signs or symptoms:

- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg- especially on one side of the body

- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause

Carteret Stroke Initiative (CSI) is a multidisciplinary team of clinical and non-clinical Carteret General Hospital employees which has been working hard to improve all aspects of stroke care at the facility. One of the biggest emphases of this group has been community awareness of risk factors and signs and symptoms of strokes. They are going out into the community, setting up booths and doing presentations at Health Fairs, churches and retirement communities to spread the word about stroke prevention and early recognition of symptoms.

CSI is also providing more staff and patient education on stroke and facilitating rehabilitation through Carteret General's physical therapy, occupational therapy and speech pathology departments.

Though awareness is promoted year round, Carteret Stroke Initiative has planned a number of activities for National Stroke Month:

- Information booths at the Otway Bloodmobile, the Senior Games Health Fair at the Leon Mann Center and the USCG Health Fair at Fort Macon.
- Free Stroke Risk Assessments and stroke information from 8:00 to 9:00 AM and 12:00 noon to 1:00 PM at Carteret General Hospital on May 15th, 24th, and 29th.
- Stroke signs and symptoms added to popcorn bags and table tents in the hospital cafeteria.

Carteret Stroke Initiative will also be initiating a Stroke Support Group this month. This group will allow stroke survivors and their family members to network and get information from various guest speakers about life after a stroke. The first meeting will be on Monday, May 14th from 3:00 to 4:00 PM in the CGH Learning Center at 3601 Bridges Street in Morehead City. The speaker at this first meeting will be Dr. Karen Skarda who is the physician member of the Carteret Stroke Initiative. The Stroke Support Group will meet on the second Monday of the month. For more information about the Stroke Support Group, call the Education Department at Carteret General Hospital at 808-6474.

Carteret General Hospital is a 135-bed hospital serving Eastern North Carolina. The Hospital offers Educational and Pursuit of Excellence Programs for Diabetes, Joint & Spine Surgery, Congestive Heart Failure, Stroke and Breast Cancer that enhance the Hospital's specialty services to a level that you would only expect at larger facilities.

For additional information about Carteret General Hospital, call 252.808.6000 or visit the hospital's website at www.ccgh.org.