

# American Heart Month message is to get help fast

DALLAS — When it comes to saving lives from heart disease and stroke — time can mean the difference between life or death.

Each year, according to the American Heart Association (AHA), more than 250,000 lives are needlessly lost or impaired because people wait too long to seek help at the onset of warning signs of a heart attack.

This month, during American Heart Month, the AHA is encouraging people to seek help at the first signs of heart attack or stroke and not be embarrassed by a possible "false alarm." The theme of this year's American Heart Month is "Don't die of embarrassment."

"In the case of heart attack, time is muscle," said Sidney C. Smith, Jr., M.D., president of the American Heart Association. "The longer blood does not flow

to the heart, the longer the heart muscle is deprived of oxygen. Without oxygen, the muscle tissue dies."

"Medical personnel can administer thrombolytic drugs or perform angioplasty," said Smith. "Either will open up the arteries and restore the flow of blood. These therapies have their maximum effectiveness within the first two hours of a heart attack. Those who wait too long to get medical help, but survive their attack, may find their remaining years and quality of life drastically reduced because only a portion of their heart is able to pump the blood their body needs."

Similarly, in the case of stroke, "time is brain tissue," said Harold P. Adams, Jr., M.D., chairman of the AHA Stroke Council. "When the brain is

deprived of oxygen, the tissue dies. You can often walk away from a heart attack without being significantly changed, but stroke has the potential to cause profound effects on one's ability to be independent. For example, stroke can lead to decreased ability to communicate and decreased physical mobility. In addition, it can take a serious toll on family members who have to provide the caregiving," said Adams.

It is important to know the warning signs of heart attack and stroke. The symptoms of heart attack are uncomfortable pressure, fullness, squeezing or pain in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes or goes away and comes back; pain that spreads to the shoulders, neck or arms; chest discomfort with lightheadedness,

fainting, sweating, nausea or shortness of breath.

The warning signs of stroke are sudden weakness or numbness on one side of the body; loss of speech or trouble talking or understanding others; sudden dimness or loss of vision, particularly in one eye; sudden, severe headaches with no apparent cause and unexplained dizziness, unsteadiness or sudden falls, especially along with any of the symptoms mentioned above.

For more information about American Heart Month activities or to learn more about heart attack and stroke, call your local AHA office or 1-800-AHA-USA1.

The American Heart Association spent more than \$236 million during fiscal year 1994-1995 for research support, public and professional education, and community programs. With more than 4 million volunteers, the AHA is the largest voluntary health organization fighting heart disease and stroke, which annually kill more than 950,000 Americans.

## HEALTH

### Outspoken Former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Joycelyn Elders To Lecture At CCSN



Former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Joycelyn Elders, the first African American woman to hold that post, will speak at the Community College of Southern Nevada (CCSN) on Friday, February 23, as part of the college's Distinguished Lecturer Series. The public is invited to her 7:30 p.m. address on national health issues at the Nicholas Horn Theatre on the Cheyenne Campus. Tickets may be reserved by calling 651-LIVE for \$15 or \$10 for students with ID and seniors 62 and older.

## Why Blacks Avoid Organ Donation

By Nichole Davis  
Sentinel-Voice

Although the need for organs is great, many blacks avoid the organ donation process due to fears and misunderstandings, but the process itself is very straight forward, experts said.

According to published reports, religious beliefs, racism, poor access to medical care, a lack of appropriate organ procurement specialists and intra-family relationships were reasons blacks gave for not learning about the organ donation process.

Despite a great need, local experts add that fear of death, mistrust of the medical establishment and a lack of knowledge about transplantation were roadblocks as well, said Ken Richardson, executive director of the Nevada Donor Network.

"African-Americans make up 30 percent of the waiting list for kidney transplantation on the national level. Locally about 60 percent of our patients are African-American," Richardson said.

The NDN started a minority affairs committee to examine the situation and create methods to increase donation in the black community; but change takes time, time patients waiting for organs may not have.

"If people don't donate, you can't do transplants. It's just that simple," Richardson said.

Black transplant specialists have also searched for creative ways to get blacks to donate organs. Dr. Clive Callender, a Howard University transplant specialist, organized the Minority Organ Tissue Transplant Education Program.

MOTTEP maintains figures on minority transplantation and lobbies on behalf of blacks with the United Network for Organ Sharing, which maintains the national organ waiting list.

"The number one problem in

transplantation today is a shortage of organs. Because 10 people die a day because of this shortage, we can ill afford to lose an organ," Callender said.

This is how experts said the organ donation process works: First, a potential organ donor is identified by the attending doctor. Then, a different set of doctors, the transplant recovery team, is notified of an available organ.

A transplant coordinator would then check to see if the potential donor has a communicable disease, for example, when they assess the appropriateness of the organ.

Once these tasks are completed, the facilitator approaches the family to obtain consent. Even if the person has signed an organ donor card and/or a living will, the family is always consulted.

"They would never go against the wishes of the family. If the family isn't comfortable with that, the procurement process ends. This is not a high pressure sales pitch," said Lynn Scott, a transplant facilitator.

Once consent has been given, doctors draw a blood sample for a process which identifies cell markers (antigens) called tissue typing. The results of these tests are fed into the national database and the

organ(s) are given to the individual with the best match locally, regionally then nationally.

The only exception is when there is a perfect match. That

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## New medicines give hope to people everywhere

By Larry Lucas

If medicines were treated like wines, 1995 would be considered a very good year. There were 28 new drugs and 2 new vaccines approved for marketing last year, including several important medical breakthroughs. They include:

- The first drug ever to treat Lou Gehrig's Disease, a progressive muscle-paralysis disease that led to the death of the Yankee first baseman in 1941. The drug's manufacturer, Rhone-Poulenc Rorer, has announced that the drug, Rilutek, will be made available to all patients who need it.

- A new drug that helps prevent osteoporosis without using hormones. The drug, called Fosamox, has been shown to increase bone mass and could help prevent hip fractures and other broken bones in older women. About 20 million American women now suffer from some form of osteoporosis.

- A vaccine to prevent chicken

pox, which could save an estimated \$384 million a year in healthcare costs.

- Two promising medicines for AIDS.

- A new medicine for advanced prostate cancer, which kills more than 40,000 American men each year.

- A new drug to treat advanced breast cancer. An estimated 184,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in 1996, and 6 percent of them will have the advanced disease.

- A new medicine for cancer of the esophagus.

- Two medicines for Type II

diabetes.

- A medicine that gives people with cardiac fibrillation an alternative to an electric charge administered to the heart with paddles pressed to the chest.

- A new drug to prevent organ rejection in kidney transplant patients. More than 10,000 kidneys are transplanted each year, but in about half the cases, the patient's immune system tries to reject the new kidney. In clinical trials, the new medicine helped cut the rejection rate.

These and other new medicines will help millions of people lead longer, healthier

lives. And pharmaceutical companies have hundreds of potential new medicines in the pipeline.

This year alone, drug companies are expected to spend \$15.8 billion researching new cures. That should be a source of hope for people everywhere.

For a free copy of "New Drug Approvals in 1995," write to PhRMA, 1100 15th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

Larry Lucas is Associate Vice President of the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America.

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