

Stroke

(Continued from Page 1) said. "They just slip her through the system so they can get the money."

The doctors told Hood the Down syndrome was not the cause of Nichols' stroke.

"They never found out what caused the stroke," Hood said. But now the doctors believe it was due to clogged arteries she said.

Although Nichols spent most of her life eating healthy under her mother's care, a few months prior to the stroke she was not eating the right foods.

"She was in a group home at the time. They didn't watch her diet," Hood said. "She ate a lot of french fries and gained a lot of weight quickly."

Thinking back to those final weeks before the stroke, Hood said now she can recall warning symptoms.

"A week or two before, I noticed her speech was slurred," she said. "It runs in her dad's side of the family. He stuttered and I thought, 'Oh my goodness, she's picking up the stuttering from her dad.'"

Hood said Nichols was also having some behavioral problems, which was not part of her usual personality. She also was feeling fatigued quicker, but Hood attributed that to her weight gain.

"There were some indications that something was wrong, but I never was expecting the stroke."

Act to Prevent Strokes

Wellness advocates say there are many ways to avoid the symptoms and prevent a stroke from occurring. Fortunately, many causal factors behind this killer can be controlled. Take regular blood pressure tests, eat healthy foods, exercise, don't smoke, limit drinking alcohol, and get regular health check-ups. Incorporating these components to your life can help save your life.

"Anyone can stop smoking or loose weight," Cohen advises.

Reducing your cholesterol is another target area of prevention. Taking the appropriate medication is a good way to reduce cholesterol, but it can be expensive; generics cost less.

Another low-cost method of prevention is eating healthy.

"Eating healthy isn't a matter of money; it's a matter of education. You have to get away from the traditional foods that you grew up with," he said.

As a Black woman aware

of foods traditionally eaten by many Black families, Hood views bad eating habits as a major factor in why Blacks are susceptible to getting strokes.

"A lot of African-Americans, old and young, are overweight and don't eat properly," Hood said. "A stroke can happen to any of them."

Although unhealthy eating habits is applicable to why many Blacks suffer from strokes, it does not offer a final explanation to the question of why Blacks are at such a high risk for strokes.

"Some things cannot be explained with one simple answer," Cohen said.

One answer is that Blacks already have a high risk of getting hypertension, high blood pressure, and/or high cholesterol. Hypertension is very prevalent in African-Americans.

"If you can get rid of hypertension, then you can get rid of 60 percent of strokes," Cohen said.

Hypertension and high cholesterol are two of the major causes of a stroke. Cholesterol accounts for about one-third of the problem, he said. Diabetes, heart disease, and sickle cell anemia are all illnesses most commonly found in Blacks and are all risk factors for strokes as well, Cohen explained.

The statistics surrounding strokes are daunting. It is the third leading cause of death in the United States, but there is not as much focus on the disease as needed.

How Strokes Occur

"The general population doesn't know a lot about strokes," said Cohen, stroke

prevention specialist. Many people do not understand what a stroke is or know how it occurs in the brain. A stroke is also known as a "brain attack," he explained.

When blood flow is cut off from a part of the brain, a stroke occurs.

The two main types of strokes are an ischemic stroke and a hemorrhagic stroke. According to free stroke pamphlets from Sunrise Hospital, an ischemic stroke occurs when blood clots or fatty deposits block blood vessels that supply blood to the brain. A hemorrhagic stroke occurs when a vessel in the brain ruptures and the blood supply to brain cells is cut off.

Sometimes a person will have a mini-stroke before they have a stroke.

"A lot of people have small strokes," Cohen said. These small strokes are known as Transient Ischemic Attacks (TIA's). Although it is small, it shouldn't be ignored. After having a TIA a person can have a stroke within 48 hours, Cohen said.

Help and Survivor Support

From the medical perspective of the disease to the caregiver's first-hand experience with a stroke survivor, the complexity of feelings resulting from the illness is commonly shared and felt among everyone it affects. Hoods is still having trouble getting the care she needs for her daughter, but the mother is finding relief in the one door that remains open. She was invited to join a newly formed support group for caregivers of stroke survivors.

The invite came from

stroke activist John McNeil, director of the Power to End Stroke campaign at the American Heart Association.

"We support each other and share information," said Hood. The group has become a shoulder to lean on, she said. "Sometimes it feels like you're the only one in the world going through this situation, but now I know I'm not alone."

The caregiver support group is one of many programs that McNeil hopes to launch under the Power to End Stroke campaign. The campaign's main objective is to promote stroke awareness in Black communities, McNeil said. The campaign is collaborating with organizations such as the 100 Black Men of America and the Las Vegas Marathon to spread awareness. City of Las Vegas Councilman Lawrence Weekly, soon-to-be county commissioner, has also joined the awareness campaign as ambassador and co-chairman.

McNeil encourages everyone, whether affected by a stroke or not, to participate in the campaign. There is a luncheon scheduled for today, and representatives from the NAACP, Urban League, and 100 Black Men of America will be in attendance.

Jamaisa Nichols had a stroke at age 21, unexpected and almost inconceivable. But diseases do not always act in predictable ways. Strokes are killing at a rapid rate. Predictably, Black people are its main victims.

For more information on the event or about strokes, contact (702) 367-1366.



Dorothea Jones poses inside her beauty salon, DJ's Image in Cincinnati. Jones is one of hundreds of beauticians in two cities, Cincinnati and Atlanta, taught by researchers to recognize stroke warning signs and spread the word. The health advice was well received.

Beauticians form force for health

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) - Two women in Cincinnati had better leave big tips the next time they get their hair done. They survived strokes thanks to fast action by their beauticians, who were taking part in a novel program to raise stroke awareness as they clipped, straightened and braided their customers' hair.

One stylist noticed that a woman's speech was slurred, and called for help. Another woman called her hairdresser weeks after having been in the shop, describing symptoms she was having.

"The beautician recognized it as signs of a stroke, called 911, walked to the woman's apartment and waited with her until an ambulance arrived," said Dr. Dawn Kleindorfer, a University of Cincinnati neurologist who led the project and reported results at an American Stroke Association conference in San Francisco last week.

Beauticians and barbers increasingly are being used like churches to spread the word about stroke, cancer and other diseases. What they can do may be as important as any doctor, drug or diagnostic test.

That is because the key factor to surviving a stroke and limiting its damage is time. The main treatment — a clot-busting medicine called tPA — must be given within three hours of the start of symptoms to do any good. But fewer than 5 percent of stroke sufferers wind up getting it.

"By far, the biggest reason is people delay going into the hospital because they don't know the signs or realize it's an emergency," Kleindorfer said.

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