



It is a stroke? Try FAST!

By Ralph Monteagudo, DO, Lincoln Hospital & NBMC



What is a stroke? It's a brain attack.

When the heart isn't getting enough blood (therefore oxygen), we call it a heart attack. So, when the brain is deprived of blood/oxygen an attack or stroke is the result.

In general, there are two kinds of stroke – blockages and bleeds. Although they are treated differently, the symptoms are the same. Folks can experience one or several of the following...

- Sudden weakness on one side of the body.
- Sudden inability to speak or slurred speech.
- Difficulty swallowing.
- Confusion, impaired memory or inability to organize thoughts.
- Difficulty walking. Loss of balance.
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause.

Many of the stroke patients I've seen over the years have ignored these early warning signs. Why? Because there's often very little or no pain involved. They think the symptoms will just go away on their own. However, this kind of thinking is very costly.

Every minute the brain is deprived of proper blood flow means brain tissue is dying.

For best outcome, doctors have a short four (4) hour window from the first onset of symptoms to begin proper treatment. For you and I living in a rural area, our timeline is hindered by distance not only to Lincoln Hospital, but to the nearest stroke center in Spokane.

That's why Lincoln Hospital has again partnered with Sacred Heart Medical Center and Northwest MedStar Critical Care Transport to cut that timeline – giving rural patients a better chance to survive. The FAST Stroke partnership is patterned after our very successful Level One Cardiac Care program where folks experiencing chest pain come to Lincoln Hospital FIRST for diagnosis (through EKG) and stabilization.

With Level One Cardiac Care, if a clot is suspected, physicians make the call to MedStar and Sacred Heart. While the patient is being transported by helicopter, the Sacred Heart's Cardiac Cath Lab team is assembling for immediate treatment upon arrival. Our goal is for all this to take place in 90 minutes or less.

And it's worked. So can the FAST Stroke partnership, but only with the help of the community. For lives to be saved and stroke survivors to have better body function, we need strong education to recognize stroke symptoms. That's where the **FAST Stroke Protocol** comes in. This is what Lincoln County folks need to know to recognize a stroke...

- **Face:** Does the face look uneven? Ask them to smile.
- **Arms:** Does one arm drift down? Ask them to raise both arms.
- **Speech:** Does their speech sound strange? Ask them to repeat a simple phrase such as, "The grass is greener." Can they do it? Are their words slurred?
- **Time** to get help! **Call 9-1-1 immediately at any sign of a stroke** and get to Lincoln Hospital.

We will be working fast to get you diagnosed, stabilized and, if needed, flown to our partners at Sacred Heart for immediate treatment. So remember FAST. Put a plan in place with neighbors, family and caregivers to recognize the symptoms of stroke early and don't stall – make the call -- 9-1-1 and get to Lincoln Hospital FAST!

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