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Stroke patients ignore symptoms, delay treatment

Research has found 70 per cent of stroke patients and 46 per cent of bystanders did not recognise stroke at the onset of symptoms, and 85 per cent did not call an ambulance immediately, risking death or severe disability from stroke.

“Early assessment in hospital is critical,” said National Stroke Foundation Medical Director Professor Chris Bladin who was involved in the research. “There are effective treatments for stroke including the clot busting drug tPA, anticoagulants and surgery but the time window available to prevent brain death is extremely short.”

Over a quarter of research participants chose to ignore or monitor symptoms and half did not arrive at hospital until five and a half hours after the onset of symptoms.

This is alarming according to the National Stroke Foundation due to how quickly the brain cells die in the part of the brain affected by the stroke (1.9 million neurons every minute). Professor of Neurology at the University of California, Jeffery Saver calculated a piece of the brain the size of a pea dies every 12 minutes unless quick treatment is given, as published in *Stroke*.

Stroke is Australia's second biggest killer and a leading cause of disability. A stroke happens in Australia every 10 minutes and they can affect anyone of any age at any time.

To help all Australians recognise the signs of stroke and call 000 (triple zero) straight away, the National Stroke Foundation is launching a new look FAST campaign which includes pictures showing how the signs may appear. The new campaign is being launched as part of National Stroke Week (14-20 September).

“This research clearly shows the need to educate people that when stroke symptoms begin, time lost can be brain lost,” said Dr Erin Lalor, National Stroke Foundation Chief Executive.

“Everyone needs to know how to recognise a stroke because in most cases witnesses are better able to think fast and act FAST behalf of the person experiencing stroke symptoms – by calling 000 at the first signs of stroke they could help save a life.”

F.A.S.T. stands for **F**ace, **A**rms, **S**peech and **T**ime. The **FAST** test involves asking three simple questions:

- **F**ace – Check their face. Has their mouth drooped?
- **A**rms – Can they lift both arms?
- **S**peech – Is their speech slurred? Do they understand you?
- **T**ime – Time is critical. If you see any of these signs call **000** immediately

The Stroke Foundation believes the new campaign will help people of all ages and abilities including children, older people, stroke survivors and people with literacy issues and intellectual disabilities to remember the signs of stroke and the FAST test. The FAST campaign is supported in Victoria by the State Government.

The research, led by Ms Janet Bray, was conducted at Box Hill and Maroondah Hospitals for Monash and Deakin Universities. It involved in-depth interviews with 100 stroke patients and 70 bystanders and abstracts have been published in the International Journal of Stroke.

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