

From the University of Mississippi Medical Center Division of Public Affairs

STROKE AWARENESS MONTH EVENT ON TUESDAY TO HELP EDUCATE PUBLIC ON SIGNS, SYMPTOMS, PREVENTION

Media contact: Ruth Cummins at (601) 984-1100 or ricummins@umc.edu. Photos can be found [here](#).

JACKSON, Miss. – When her foot seemed to go to sleep last November and she had to drag it to walk, “it never entered my mind that I was having a stroke. I’m just 48,” said Kosciusko resident Rhonda Allen.

But the next day, Allen’s right arm did the same thing. After she dropped a bowl of stew, then a glass of iced tea, her daughter became alarmed and took her to a local hospital. From there, she was rushed to the University of Mississippi Medical Center, where she was diagnosed with having a minor stroke.

Her UMMC doctor placed her on blood thinners and blood pressure medication and has continued to monitor her care, even after transitioning her back to Allen’s primary physician in Kosciusko. “They told me not to have salt, and to keep my blood pressure down. I’m doing well,” Allen said.

Health-care professionals at UMMC’s Comprehensive Stroke Center want to ensure community residents like Allen learn not just how to recognize someone’s having a stroke, but how to prevent it in the first place.

A free public seminar at 2 p.m. May 6 at the Jackson Medical Mall, part of National Stroke Awareness Month, will offer compelling information on how to recognize and reduce stroke.

“The reality is that we are in the Stroke Belt, and we have a lot of strokes,” said Neal Kiihnl, the center’s stroke program manager. “We want to emphasize in this program knowing the signs and symptoms of a stroke, and that people need to call 911 if they suspect that’s happening. We want them to understand that, if nothing else, when they leave the program.”

A stroke occurs when a blood vessel in the brain is blocked or bursts. Part of the brain starts to die immediately because it’s not getting the blood and oxygen blood vessels transport, and parts of the body that get their signals from the injured part of the brain can’t work properly – for example, a person’s speech may slur, eyesight fail or limbs become numb on one side of the body.

The Comprehensive Stroke Center’s focus, in addition to education, is creating a network and protocol for everyone at UMMC involved in the care of a stroke patient, from start to finish. The quicker treatment is given, the less brain damage the person may suffer and the better chances of a full recovery.

“What it all boils down to is, ‘Time is brain,’ ” Kiihnl said. “Our Stroke Center streamlines this into a protocol. The more quickly you work out the processes of treatment on the front end, the more chance patients will end up walking out of the hospital, not rolling out in a wheelchair.”

In 2012, the most recent year in which information is available from the state Department of Health, stroke was the fifth-leading cause of death in Mississippi, accounting for more than one in every 20 deaths. In 2012, 1,509 Mississippians died of stroke, and stroke accounted for 5.1 percent of total deaths statewide. The age-adjusted death rate was 48.5 per 100,000 people, Department of Health statistics show.

Those at the seminar will learn ways they can keep from becoming a statistic: eating a healthier diet, exercising more, not smoking or overindulging in alcohol, not using street drugs, and carefully managing obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, high blood fats and heart disease.

The leading reasons Mississippians suffer strokes are high blood pressure and smoking, said Pamela Hargett, a registered nurse and clinical outcomes coordinator of UMMC's stroke program.

"There are other factors we talk about at our screenings, such as body mass index, being overweight, atrial fibrillation, being sedentary," Hargett said. "We go over family history of stroke. You can't control your family history, but we can help you control diabetes and other risk factors."

Seminar speakers including Dr. Rebecca Sugg, director of the Comprehensive Stroke Center, will raise stroke awareness by discussing risk factors and prevention. Paul Robertson, a UMMC registered dietician, will offer diet pointers. Afterward, Sugg and Robertson will answer questions.

"This is open to the entire community," Hargett said. "We hope to also attract folks who have not had a stroke and who want to prevent one, or anyone who wants to learn about the signals of a stroke."

For details, contact Bo Lewis at (601) 815-6110 or email umcstroke@umc.edu

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Please forward this message to colleagues who might be interested. If you wish to be removed from this list or know of a colleague to add, send an e-mail message to: jmazurak@umc.edu.

The University of Mississippi Medical Center, located in Jackson, is the state's only academic medical center. UMMC encompasses five health science schools, including medicine, nursing, health related professions, dentistry and graduate studies, as well as the site where University of Mississippi pharmacy students do their clinical training. The Medical Center's health-care enterprise includes five hospitals and University Physicians, the faculty group practice. The Medical Center's threefold mission is to educate tomorrow's health-care professionals, conduct innovative research to improve human health, and to provide the highest quality care available to the state's population. A major goal of the Medical Center is the improvement of the health of Mississippians and the elimination of health disparities. For more information, contact the Division of Public Affairs at (601) 984-1100 or umc.edu/publicaffairs