

Handle stroke victims delicately

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Rebbecca Apadet now calls walking and talking a gift. She lost the two abilities about two years after she suffered a stroke. Her peers in Osukuru village, Tororo district, first blamed the disability on witchcraft, until she went to St Anthony Hospital in Tororo district where she was diagnosed with stroke and later referred to Nakasero Hospital in Kampala.

For the first time in 66 years, the 68-year-old mother of 12 used a wheelchair. She was later treated by physiotherapists at the Stroke Rehabilitation Centre in Wampewo, Wakiso district, before she regained some ability to walk.

Before Apadet succumbed to the stroke, she was diagnosed with high blood pressure, heart disease and was overweight.

A seemingly happy Apadet revealed that she can now walk by herself and do light domestic chores.

She said before suffering from a stroke, she was the breadwinner of the family because her husband, Francis Olinga, is disabled. She earned a living through farming.

Another victim of stroke is Samuel Kiamba of Kiwenda Busika in Wakiso district.

On the morning of April 13, the 50-year-old told his wife to help him pour water in a kettle, which she did before she went to the garden. On returning, she called out to Kiamba to inquire why the chicken house was open, but got no response. She rushed into the house, only to find him immobile. She hurried him to Kiruddu Hospital, where doctors confirmed he had got a stroke.

After a month in Kiruddu without improvement, Dr Ibrahim Bukunya from Mulago Hospital advised the couple to go to the Stroke Rehabilitation Centre.

According to Dr Jane Nakibuuka, a stroke is one of the most common neurological diseases among patients admitted to the neurology ward at Mulago Hospital, at 21%. She quotes unpublished research at the hospital, which showed a 30-day case fatality of 43.8% among 133 patients aged over 65 years admitted with stroke.

WHAT IS A STROKE?

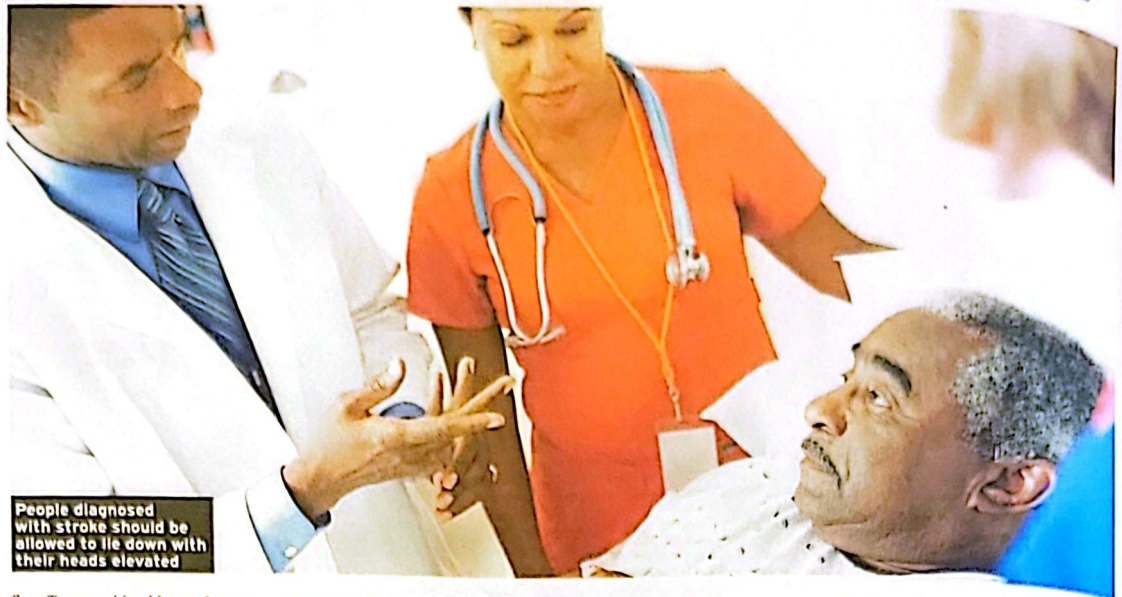
Stroke is a condition caused when a blood vessel to the brain is either blocked by a clot or bursts. When that happens, that part of the brain, where the vessel was taking blood, cannot get the blood, oxygen and nutrients and the cells die.

This can happen when a blood clot blocks a brain artery (ischemic stroke) or ruptures to bleed in or around the brain (Haemorrhagic stroke) or in rare cases; a tumour, an infection or brain swelling if an injury or illness blocks blood flow.

WHO IS AT RISK?

According to Dr Joel Kinyabwire, a neurosurgeon at Mulago Hospital, stroke may result from a disorder in blood vessels such as accumulation of fat tissues in the vessels.

"When fats are deposited in the blood vessels, they hamper blood



People diagnosed with stroke should be allowed to lie down with their heads elevated

flow. To move, blood has to force its way through the vessels, hence the heart has to pump harder, increasing blood pressure, which can lead to rupture of the blood vessels in some people," he explains.

Kinyabwire revealed that a stroke can also result from physical

inactivity, obesity, diabetes, smoking, drinking alcohol, poor feeding and stress.

The doctor also adds that having a history of a stroke in the family, uncontrolled hypertension and trauma on the skull (head injuries) puts one at a risk of

suffering from a stroke.

HOW TO MANAGE STROKE

Ibrahim Bukunya, a physiotherapist at the Stroke Rehabilitation Centre, says stroke must

be managed in the initial stages by controlling what has caused it. For example, a patient with a blood clot in the brain is started on anti-coagulant medication to dissolve and clear it up.

He further says if the stroke is due to high blood pressure in the brain, the patient is started on anti-hypertensive treatment to normalise the blood pressure and if it is a tumour in the brain, it must be removed to release pressure from the blood vessels.

"A patient needs to regain his or her normal body functions first through rehabilitation to prevent complications," he advises.

Bukunya says a patient and caretakers should be counselled to understand the condition at hand. "If the patient is bedridden, he or she should be positioned well to avoid bed sores on the body," he said. "Carers should be taught how to take the patient through exercise in order to facilitate quick recovery. Everything needs to be handled sensitively, including feeding, so as not to choke the patient."

Bukunya advises that a person, who suffers from a stroke should be rushed to the hospital, where he can get primary medication before being referred to a rehabilitation centre.

At the rehabilitation centre, exercises last for a minimum of 20 to 30 minutes and are regulated not to affect the brain.

HOW TO AVOID STROKE

Bukunya says avoiding stroke should start early in life. People should go for regular checkups, monitor blood pressure and sugar every three months and reduce the amounts of fats in the body, he said.

He said exercising moderately, at least five days a week, can prevent stroke. This, he said, can be done through walking, golfing, playing tennis and football.

DOS AND DON'TS FOR PATIENTS

According to Dr Ibrahim Bukunya:

Know when the symptoms started. It will help the emergency team to act as efficiently as possible and doctors to determine the appropriate treatment.

Help the person lie down. Stroke can cause dizziness, difficulty in movement and sometimes paralysis. Keep stroke victims on their side with the head slightly elevated to enhance blood flow. But if the person has fallen and got head and neck trauma, do not move them unless there is a spinal cord injury.

Loosen restrictive clothing. This helps the stroke victim breathe easily. Avoid pulling or straining any weakened limbs.

If the person is unconscious, check his or her breathing. Check for pulse and breathing. If there is no pulse, begin cardiopulmonary resuscitation immediately.

Stay calm and remain by the person's side. It can be difficult to keep calm, but remember you are there to help. The person will likely be disoriented and frightened. Stay nearby and speak softly. Assure the person that help is on the way.

Do not give the person aspirin because it will make things much worse. One has to undergo a CT scan for doctors to know which of those two groups a stroke victim is in. If you give a person aspirin before you know which one, there is a chance you could do serious harm.

Do not give the person anything to eat or drink. Stroke can cause difficulty with muscle control, including the ability to swallow.



A stroke may cause difficulty in walking, but this can be overcome through physiotherapy

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PRACTICAL STEPS TO DETECT STROKE

The stroke rehabilitation centre at Wampewo recommends a technique known as FAST (Face, Arms, Speech and Time) which helps to identify the warning signs of a stroke.

1 FACE: The mouth turns one side and the eye

stops blinking

2 ARMS: When you raise both arms, one arm tends to drift down

3 SPEECH: Speech is slurred. The patient has trouble talking

4 TIME: If you experience any of these symptoms, call the doctor or the hospital immediately. Other signs include sudden confusion, difficulty in walking, sudden dizziness or loss of co-ordination, constant headache and vomiting.