



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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I will NOT have a stroke! *May is Stroke Awareness Month*

HONOLULU – The Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH), Developmental Disabilities Division's Neurotrauma Program recognizes May as National Stroke Awareness Month. Stroke is the #1 cause of disability and the third leading cause of death in Hawai'i. This is higher than the national average of stroke as the fifth leading cause of death among Americans. The incidence of stroke has steadily increased in the U.S. over the past seven years and people are experiencing strokes at increasingly younger ages. This means the number of people living a greater part of their lifetime with a disability is also increasing. This impacts quality of life for the stroke survivor and often their family.

It is important to know that most STROKES ARE PREVENTABLE.

Throughout the month of May, Hawai'i residents can learn more about stroke prevention while practicing physical distancing. Go to: <https://health.hawaii.gov/nt/news/strokeawareness2021/> and complete a self-assessment from the National Stroke Association to assess your risk for stroke. This site also has tools and resources for stroke education, prevention, signs and symptoms of stroke, and what to do if someone is experiencing a stroke. Individuals experiencing a stroke may not realize what is happening, but if people nearby recognize the symptoms, they can provide help.

A stroke occurs when blood flow through an artery to the brain is cut off -- either by a blockage or because the artery ruptures and bleeds into the brain tissue. A blockage is more common, accounting for 87% of all strokes. The average person's brain ages about 3.6 years for every hour a large vessel occlusion stroke goes untreated. Strokes are a serious medical emergency and must be treated immediately.

One of our DDD coworkers learned first-hand the importance of recognizing the signs and symptoms and seeking treatment immediately, as well as the impact a stroke can have on an individual and their entire family. "Immediately following my Dad's stroke, it was tough to see him go from being so independent to needing help with the most basic movements," says Jennifer La'a, community resources branch chief at the Developmental Disabilities Division. "My dad waited several days before telling us he didn't feel well. The delay in getting care multiplied the damaging effects of the stroke. In what seemed like an instant, he went from extremely

capable to extremely vulnerable. In the six years since his stroke he's worked very hard to regain as much independence as possible."

Ms. La'a is sharing her father's story in hopes of helping other Hawai'i families to recognize stroke symptoms and seek speedy treatment.

"My dad is an artist and art is such a big part of who he is. We planned a big family trip to visit art all over New York City. My dad was so excited, he would have his family and his art, together in one place, it was to be THE trip of a life time. Because of the stroke, my dad missed that trip."

"Recovery has been a slow and steady process. Determined to get the most out of life and be as healthy as possible, my dad constantly works to build up his skills and independence. His diligence has resulted in him being able to drive himself to the gym to lift weights. Two years ago we enjoyed a family trip to Japan and now we're working on taking that trip to New York."

In the event of a stroke, think "F.A.S.T."

F = Face drooping. Is one side of the person's face drooping or numb? When he or she smiles, is the smile uneven?

A = Arm weakness. Is the person experiencing weakness or numbness in one arm? Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?

S = Speech difficulty. Is the person's speech suddenly slurred or hard to understand? Is he or she unable to speak? Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence. Can he or she repeat it back?

T = Time to call 9-1-1. If any of these symptoms are present, dial 9-1-1 immediately. Check the time so you can report when the symptoms began.

The DOH Developmental Disabilities Division, Neurotrauma Program encourages everyone to learn their stroke risk and talk with their health care provider about ways to reduce that risk. The following are risk factors for individuals to control, treat and improve upon to reduce the risk of having a stroke:

- Regularly check and control your blood pressure
- Quit smoking
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Eat a healthy diet low in sodium with 5+ servings of fruits and vegetables per day
- Increase physical activity, aiming for at least 150 minutes per week
- Properly manage medical conditions such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease and diabetes.

Please talk to your health care provider before engaging in major lifestyle changes.

For more information about the signs and symptoms of stroke, visit <https://health.hawaii.gov/nt/> or contact the **Neurotrauma Helpline at 1 (833) 333-5133**.

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