

Georgia

Preventing a Lifetime of Disability

“Patients who arrive at the emergency room within 3 hours after the first symptoms of stroke receive specialized stroke care. They tend to be healthier 3 months later than those who do not.”

*—David Loftin, EMT-P, Region 1 EMS Program Director,
Georgia Department of Community Health*

Public Health Problem

“It was hotter than July in Georgia, as my Mom and I drank lemonade on the front porch, when suddenly her face started drooping. Knowing that this might be a sign of stroke, I immediately dialed 911 and prayed for the ambulance to come quickly.”

This was the story told to Jerry, the emergency medical technician who answered the call from Maggie Walton, a Georgia woman who knew to act quickly when she thought her mother was having a stroke. In 2006, Georgia health officials reported 119 stroke deaths for every 100,000 residents aged 35 years or older, compared with the national average of 98.

Across the United States, someone has a new or recurrent stroke every 40 seconds, for a total of 795,000 strokes a year. Strokes are now the nation's fourth leading cause of death and the leading cause of long-term disability. In 2009, death and disability from strokes cost an estimated \$68.9 billion in patient care and rehabilitative expenses across the country.

Minutes count when it comes to saving lives and preventing long-term disability from strokes. Because more than half of stroke patients who come to the emergency room arrive by ambulance,

health officials in Georgia are working to improve coordination between emergency medical services (EMS) first responders and hospitals as a way to save lives, lower medical costs, and improve quality of life outcomes for patients.

Taking Action

In 2008, several groups in Georgia began working together to improve outcomes for stroke victims by offering training and certification in Advanced Stroke Life Support (ASLS). The ASLS training teaches first responders how to recognize stroke symptoms and give patients fast, appropriate treatment.

Participating partners included the Northwest Georgia Region 1 EMS, the district offices of the Georgia Department of Community Health in Rome and Dalton, and the Get With The Guidelines-Stroke program of the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association (AHA/ASA).

With help from CDC's Preventive Health and Health Services (PHHS) Block Grant, this partnership has improved stroke care in northwest Georgia in the following ways:

- EMS providers in 16 counties and medical staff at 15 area hospitals have received ASLS training.



Healthy People 2010 Objective

Emergency medical services

PHHS Block Grant Funding

Represents 50%–74% of total program costs



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Taking Action (continued)

- Hospitals in Rome and Dalton have completed the rigorous application process to become Primary or Comprehensive Stroke Centers with help from the Northwest Georgia Region 1 EMS and the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospital Organizations.
- Health officials provide ongoing stroke education to residents in 16 Northwest Georgia communities.

Impact

Thanks to PHHS Block Grant funds, EMS providers and hospitals in north Georgia have made progress toward improving care for stroke patients and reducing future medical costs. For example, in 2009,

- The Northeast Georgia Region 1 EMS and local hospitals adopted the AHA/ASA stroke care guidelines.
- Three area medical centers received the Joint Commission's Certificate of Distinction for Primary Stroke

Centers and were designated as such by the state of Georgia.

- Two Comprehensive Stroke Centers that provide specialized acute care were scheduled to open in 2011.

According to the AHA/ASA, most EMS systems and hospitals that use the Get With The Guidelines-Stroke program report measurable improvements in patient care. Late in 2010, the Georgia Department of Human Resources announced plans to revamp all of the state's hospital and EMS systems to enable them to provide specialized stroke care, and they are using the model created in northwest Georgia.

Maggie Walton knows firsthand how important these efforts are. Since the stroke, she reports that her mother "has regained her ability to talk and walk normally because of the quick ambulance response time and hospital care she received in those first critical hours. It really feels like a miracle."

For more information on the PHHS Block Grant, go to www.cdc.gov/phhsblockgrant

For more information on Healthy People, go to www.healthypeople.gov



PHHS Block Grant Supports Georgia's Healthy People 2011 Priorities

The PHHS Block Grant provides flexible funding that states can use to prevent and control chronic diseases, respond quickly to outbreaks of infections and waterborne diseases, and address their specific public health needs. States can align their programs with health objectives from *Healthy People 2010*.

Georgia uses its funds to address 14 health objective priorities, including

- Emergency medical services.
- Coronary heart disease.
- Vaccine-preventable diseases.
- Hazardous sites.
- Rape or attempted rape.

For a complete list of funded health objectives, go to www.cdc.gov/phhsblockgrant/hp2010.htm