

World Stroke Day – 29 October 2019

# Recognizing the signs and taking immediate action



Interview with Dr. Julien Bogousslavsky, a Swiss Medical Association (FMH) Specialist in Neurology at Clinique Valmont in Glion sur Montreux (Switzerland) and Chief Medical Officer of GSMN Neurocentre, specialized in the treatment of brain and nervous system diseases.

## **A cerebrovascular accident or stroke can strike anyone, at any time.**

It occurs when blood flow to a part of the brain is interrupted either by obstruction or the rupture of a blood vessel. Because the brain no longer receives enough oxygen, some of its functions (movement, speech, sight) cease to function. It is important to take immediate action. Indeed, the faster blood circulation is restored, the less nerve cells are damaged and the better the prognosis. This is why it is important to recognize stroke symptoms.

## **Dr. Bogousslavsky, can you tell us what the warning signs of a stroke are?**

A stroke does not produce warning signs as such. We refer more to risk factors such as hypertension, diabetes, obesity, cholesterol, smoking and sleep apnea. Nonetheless, it is important to note that half of all stroke victims first have a minor stroke, referred to as a transient attack. Because these attacks are short and last only a few minutes, they are commonly neglected once the symptoms have gone. Recognition of these warning signs is important as one third of such attacks are followed by a stroke.

## **What are the symptoms and how do you recognize them?**

Precursory symptoms include dizziness and sudden loss of balance, loss of strength and/or sensitivity in an arm, a leg, half of the face or all of one side of the body, sudden difficulty in finding words or expressing them (sentences or words are incomprehensible), the sudden loss of vision on one side or a reduced visual field.

## **What should you do when you detect one or more of these symptoms?**

You must seek immediate medical attention. These symptoms indicate a medical emergency requiring urgent care. In stroke cases, medical treatment is very limited in time. This is why a quick diagnosis is essential to limit, as much as possible, potential brain damage or neurological after-effects.

## **Over fifty percent of stroke victims have to learn to live with these after-effects.**

### **Can you explain what they are?**

There are many. These include difficulty in speaking or writing, a partial or complete paralysis of one half of the body, memory disorders, behavioral changes or a sensation of extreme fatigue.

The extent of damage really depends on the size and region of the brain that was deprived of oxygen.

## **Neurological rehabilitation is an integral part of post-stroke treatment. What are the recommended therapies?**

Post-stroke rehabilitation

covers four main specialty fields. Speech therapy deals with language, speech and swallowing disorders. Neuropsychology treats cognitive disorders in general (memory, attention, and so forth.). Physiotherapy includes walking rehabilitation and occupational therapy works on upper limb (hand or arm) rehabilitation, balance and the ability to write, among other things. It is not uncommon for stroke victims to be deprived of certain “basic” functions and to have to relearn how to walk, speak, write or swallow. Therapists are there to teach these victims how to cope better with their disability and enable them to regain as much independence as possible in their daily life activities. ■

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