

Quick Action Saves Life

Issue

Imagine waking up at 4:00 a.m., experiencing signs and symptoms of a stroke, and knowing exactly what to do, thanks to a recent stroke education event at your church. This real-life scenario took place when a Midlands-area woman woke up her husband, who immediately called 9-1-1 to prevent long-term damage and disability.

Heart disease and stroke, respectively, are the number one and three leading causes of death among African Americans in S.C. Compared to Caucasians, African Americans are twice as likely to have a stroke and tend to have strokes at earlier ages.

Intervention

Thanks to grant money from the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control's (DHEC) Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Division, the agency's Public Health Region 3 staff have been able to educate the community on risks and signs and symptoms of stroke. Regional staff have used the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association's *Power to End Stroke* educational and awareness campaign to reach disparate African-American church populations.

DHEC Region 3 staff worked closely with a well-known church outside of Columbia, where the pastor noted that most of his congregation was overweight with serious health concerns. The following took place:

- DHEC Region 3 staff made a *Power to End Stroke* presentation at this church in February 2009, during regular Wednesday Night Prayer Service, with over 40 participants in attendance;
- Church members were enthusiastic about receiving this educational information, and asked important questions relating to preparation of meals and how to alter their lifestyles;
- Attendees learned how to recognize the warning signs of stroke and heart attacks, were instructed about healthy eating habits and good nutrition, learned the significance of family medical history, and the importance of physical activity.

Impact

After taking part in *Power to End Stroke*, this congregation has instituted several healthy activities in their church, as well as generated general awareness for healthy lifestyles:

- Congregation members have made changes in food preparation for church events, including serving more fruits, salads and vegetables;
- The church has established walking trails to promote physical activity among their congregation; and
- Church members now have increased awareness of the importance of knowing and controlling blood pressure and blood cholesterol.

Additionally, several church members have expressed an interest in becoming *Power to End Stroke* Ambassadors, in an effort to reduce health disparities within the community.

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