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Canadian study shows dementia patients more likely to die or be disabled after stroke

LOS ANGELES, CA. -- People with a pre-existing diagnosis of dementia are twice as likely to die when they have a stroke than other stroke patients, according to a Canadian study to be presented today at the International Stroke Conference.

Lead author Dr. Gustavo Saposnik of the University of Toronto studied 9,304 patients in the Registry of the Canadian Stroke Network, a database of patients admitted to hospital with stroke. Of those, 702 – almost one in 10 – had a diagnosis of dementia. The study involved data from 12 hospitals and looked at patients who had their first acute stroke caused by a blood clot or blocked artery.

Thirty days after the stroke, 10 per cent of patients with dementia had died, compared to five per cent of patients with no dementia. A year after the stroke, 34 per cent of patients with dementia had died, compared to 14 per cent of people who didn't have dementia before their stroke.

Dr. Saposnik says the higher mortality seems to be explained by the higher prevalence of comorbid conditions, which may lead to frailty. Patients with dementia had more severe strokes and they were older (mean age of 81 vs. 70 years) than other stroke patients.

The study found that patients with pre-existing dementia were less likely to get clot-busting drugs to reduce stroke damage and they were less likely to get imaging scans of their blocked arteries. They were also more likely to be disabled (80 per cent vs. 56 per cent) and they were more likely to be institutionalized. Only 24 per cent of these patients returned to their pre-stroke place of residence, compared to 45 per cent of stroke patients without dementia.

With an aging population, more people with stroke have pre-existing dementia and it is important to study the link between the two, Dr. Saposnik says. "Little is known about how pre-existing dementia influences care processes and outcomes after stroke."

“This research really underscores the need to screen for and control stroke risk factors in patients with dementia because they are more likely to suffer a severe and disabling stroke,” says Dr. Antoine Hakim, Scientific Director of the Canadian Stroke Network.

The major controllable risk factor for stroke is high blood pressure. There are about 50,000 new strokes in Canada each year and 315,000 people living with the after-effects of a stroke.

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The **Canadian Stroke Network** (canadianstrokenetwork.ca) brings together Canada’s leading scientists and clinicians to reduce the physical, social and economic impact of stroke on the lives of individual Canadians and on society as a whole. Headquartered at the University of Ottawa, the Canadian Stroke Network is one of Canada’s Networks of Centres of Excellence.