



Canadian Stroke Network

Réseau canadien contre  
les accidents cérébrovasculaires

For release: Thursday, February 10, 2011

## TIA patients with speech difficulties more likely to suffer from irregular heartbeat

LOS ANGELES, CA. \_ Patients who have a mini-stroke accompanied by speech problems, are more likely to suffer from a treatable heart condition called atrial fibrillation, according to Ottawa research presented today at the International Stroke Conference.

Dr. Mukul Sharma, deputy director of the Canadian Stroke Network and an author of the study, said that speech problems “provide a clinical clue for physicians, alerting them to the need to look early and suspiciously at the heart” as the origin of a mini-stroke, or transient ischemic attack (TIA).

TIA patients have a 10-per-cent risk of a major stroke within 90 days, with half of strokes occurring in the first week. That’s why identifying the cause of TIA quickly and effectively is critical.

Atrial fibrillation (AF), or irregular heartbeat, is a common and treatable risk factor for stroke but it frequently goes undetected. Patients with AF can be closely monitored and prescribed medication to prevent blood clots.

Dr. Sharma and his team studied 1,369 patients with TIA treated in The Ottawa Hospital’s emergency department. Of these patients, 48 were identified as having speech difficulties. The study found that patients with speech difficulties were twice as likely to have had a blood clot that originated in the heart than other TIA patients (20.8% vs. 10%).

In addition to his role at the Canadian Stroke Network, Dr. Sharma is also the director of The Ottawa Hospital Stroke Clinic and an assistant professor of neurology at the University of Ottawa.

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