

How to Have a Stroke Smart Medical Office

Begin with Stroke Smart Medical Practices

Although the window for the most effective stroke treatment is incredibly short (3 hours), too many studies* suggest that one in three stroke patients first calls their medical provider after stroke signs and symptoms begin. The patient may leave a message if the office is busy, and possibly hear back hours later. The patient may simply request an appointment for some time the next day, placing themselves well outside the treatment window. Although highly effective treatment for strokes is available when accessed in time, strokes remain the #1 cause of disability in the U.S. because people fail to recognize the medical emergency and don't call 9-1-1 immediately.

Strokes kill 2 million brain cells every minute--some of those brain cells allow us to speak, understand speech, feed ourselves, etc. and when they die, we are often left without those abilities. Stroke related disabilities are often avoidable if we receive care within the short treatment window. Although our primary care doctors play an indispensable role in our overall health, calling 9-1-1 is the most effective way to reach timely stroke treatment. This tendency of stroke patients to call their doctor rather than 9-1-1 increases their likelihood of suffering lifelong disabilities and underscores the need for each medical practice to become Stroke Smart.

Medical practices have the potential to reach significant populations and offer authoritative guidance. A Stroke Smart medical office...

1. Displays Stroke Smart magnets/wallet cards/posters in high visibility areas,
2. Offers callers a Stroke Smart voice message, naming stroke symptoms (i.e., sudden onset dizziness/loss of balance, vision changes, facial drooping, body weakness/numbness, etc.) and encourages the caller to hang up and immediately call 9-1-1 rather than leave a voice message or book an appointment if experiencing the symptoms.
 - A downloadable voicemail script is available that gives patients instructions on what to do if they suspect a stroke. (SCRIPT BELOW)
3. Educates all receptionists/call takers to screen patients booking appointments for stroke symptoms, encouraging callers with those symptoms to immediately hang up and call 9-1-1,
4. Provides Stroke Smart education (identifying the patient's risk factors and highlighting the signs of symptoms of stroke, emphasizing the immediate need to call 9-1-1) during patient intake, while taking vitals and gathering patient history, and
5. Encourages each patient to become a Stroke Smart champion, educating others about the signs and symptoms of a stroke and emphasizing the need to call 9-1-1.

Stroke Phone Message Template - SCRIPT

LONG VERSION

If this is an emergency, hang up and call 911

[INSERT SCRIPT HERE]

If you have vague symptoms, you may be having a stroke. Are you experiencing:

- Loss of Balance, Dizziness or Trouble Walking
- Changes in Vision
- One Side of Face uneven or drooping
- Weakness or numbness in an Arm on one side of the body
- Difficulty speaking or confusion
- Sudden onset of a severe headache

Call 911 immediately, even if you have only ONE symptom.

If you had the symptoms, but they seem to have gone away, call 911 now because you may have had a mini stroke, often followed by a full-blown stroke.

If you're not sure whether you are having a stroke, call 911 still Let emergency responders determine if you need immediate medical attention.

Push 2 to repeat

SHORTER VERSION

If this is an emergency, hang up and call 911

[INSERT SCRIPT HERE]

If you have vague symptoms, you may be having a stroke. Are you experiencing:

- Loss of Balance, Dizziness or Trouble Walking
- Changes in Vision
- One Side of Face uneven or drooping
- Weakness or numbness in an Arm on one side of the body
- Difficulty speaking or confusion
- Sudden onset of a severe headache

Call 911 immediately, even if you have only ONE symptom Or the symptoms seem to have STOPPED.

Push 2 to repeat

SHORTEST VERSION

If this is an emergency, hang up and call 911

[INSERT SCRIPT HERE]

If you are calling to schedule an appointment for the following symptoms, you may be experiencing a stroke.

Call 911 immediately if you are experiencing sudden onset of even one of the following:

- loss of balance, dizziness, or trouble walking
- vision changes
- facial drooping
- numbness or weakness
- difficulty speaking or confusion
- severe headache

Push 2 to repeat