

*"Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and the most inhumane."
– Martin Luther King, Jr.*



Roberta Jordan

Changes That Change Your Life



Jeffrey E. Thomas, MD, FACS

"I'm blessed to be able to do the things I'm doing," says Roberta Jordan of her recovery from a stroke. Last year, an extremely painful headache sent Ms. Jordan to the emergency room. In the ER she learned that her "headache" was actually a burst blood vessel in the brain. "Had I not gone to the hospital and had I been as stubborn as I normally am, they probably wouldn't have caught it in time."

Today, Ms. Jordan is back at work and continues to care for her 88 year-old mother. "She looks terrific," says Dr. Jeffrey Thomas, Neurosurgical Director of California Pacific Medical Center's Comprehensive Stroke Program and the surgeon who repaired Ms. Jordan's blood vessel. "You cannot tell that she had brain surgery. That is certainly a modern success story for stroke."

What is a Stroke?

A stroke is a "brain attack" that happens when blood vessels in the brain become blocked or burst. This slows or stops the blood flow to the brain. Without blood flow, brain cells cannot get oxygen and the cells begin to die.

Stroke is the third leading cause of death in the United States and is the number one cause of adult disability. Stroke is more common in African-Americans — even those who are young or middle aged. If you have high blood pressure, diabetes, a family history of stroke, or if you smoke, you have a greater chance of having a stroke.

Change the Things Under Your Control

Although you can't change your family history, you can change how you take of yourself.

"Controlling your blood pressure is the most important thing you can do to prevent stroke," emphasizes Dr. Thomas. "The best way to manage your blood pressure is to see a physician regularly. You need the guidance of your doctor to keep you on the right track." Medications are the most effective way to reduce blood pressure. Your physician may also recommend lifestyle changes such as exercise and reducing the salt in your food.

In addition to controlling your blood pressure, it is important to avoid smoking. Smoking damages blood vessels, which leads to strokes and heart attacks. Unfortunately, the effects of smoking on blood vessels are often overlooked. "People

think of lungs when they think of the bad effects of smoking," says Dr. Thomas, "but everyone gets arterial disease from smoking. The effects of the smoke go right to the arteries." Talk with your physician about programs or medication that can help you quit.

Think F.A.S.T. to Recognize the Signs of a Stroke

F = Face numbness or weakness,

A = Arm or leg weakness,

S = Speech problems

T = Time, call 911 immediately. A stroke is a medical emergency. Some stroke medications are most effective in the first 3 hours after symptoms appear.

Stroke symptoms appear suddenly and most strokes do not cause pain.

Some people may experience small strokes called Transient Ischemic Attacks (TIAs). Although the symptoms of these small strokes may only last a few moments, these signs cannot be ignored. **Get medical treatment immediately.**

The most important thing you can do to prevent a stroke is to take good care of your health. Regular check-ups with your physician are important. He/she can monitor your health, answer your questions, and talk with you about your concerns.

If you do see the signs of stroke, remember that every minute counts. "Take care of it," Ms. Jordan advises, "don't wait until it's too late."

Stroke Resources in San Francisco

California Pacific Medical Center: 888-637-2762, Physician Referral
Comprehensive Stroke Care Center: 415-600-5760

Chinese Hospital: 415-677-2365, Physician Referral

Kaiser Permanente San Francisco: 415-833-3450, Physician Referral

Saint Francis Memorial Hospital: 415-353-6566, Physician Referral
Acute Rehab Unit: 353-6270

St. Luke's Hospital: 415-821-3627, Physician Referral

Comprehensive Stroke Care Center: 415-600-5760

St. Mary's Medical Center: 800-444-2303, Physician Referral

San Francisco General Hospital: 415-206-5176, Physician Referral

UCSF Medical Center: 888-689-8273, Physician Referral

VA Medical Center San Francisco:

415-221-4810 x2234, Physician Referral

For more information, visit www.hospitalcouncil.net click on the African American Health Disparity Project tab or email aaahdp@sbcglobal.net or phone the Hospital Council at 415-616-9990.