

NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health

HYPERTENSION DAY PROMOTES STRESS-FREE LIFESTYLES

VICTORIA – Regular recreational activities such as Tai Chi can help British Columbians reduce stress levels, which can cause hypertension, a condition more commonly known as persistent high blood pressure.

Health Minister George Abbott and Minister of State for ActNow BC Gordon Hogg took part in a Tai Chi demonstration on the grounds of the B.C. Legislature to mark World Hypertension Awareness Week. They were joined by members of the Taoist Tai Chi Society of Canada and representatives from the Heart and Stroke Foundation of BC and Yukon.

“Stress is one cause of hypertension, which can lead to serious health conditions if not diagnosed and properly managed,” said Abbott. “Establishing healthy lifestyles is a part of preventing and managing chronic diseases in order to help British Columbians lead healthy lives which benefit patients, families and the health system.”

Hypertension is one of the risk factors for strokes, heart attacks, heart failure and arterial aneurysm and is a leading cause of chronic renal failure.

“An active lifestyle helps to lower our stress levels and results in more energy,” said Hogg. “Through ActNow BC, we can manage stress by eating well and getting regular physical exercise. Simple activities such as Tai Chi are pathways to improved health - every move is a good move.”

Approximately 700,000 people in B.C. have been treated for hypertension, the main cause of a stroke. More than 6,000 British Columbians experience a stroke each year, and annually over 2,000 British Columbians die from stroke-related symptoms.

“Healthy blood pressure and better circulation can be achieved by the practice of this stress-reducing exercise, as well as improved strength, stamina, balance and flexibility,” said Rod Edwards, a 28-year member of the Taoist Tai Chi Society of Canada. “People of all ages and abilities can benefit from the gentle turning and stretching movements of this art.”

“Reducing everyday stress in our lives can lower our blood pressure and prevent hypertension, which is good for our heart and overall health,” said Bobbe Wood, president and CEO of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of BC and Yukon.

Through government's partnership with the BC Medical Association under the General Practice Services Committee, \$20 million was allocated to better support the care offered in the community by GPs, which included diagnoses and treatment for patients with hypertension.

In 2006/07, government provided the Heart and Stroke Foundation of BC and Yukon with a \$2.5 million grant to enhance and build capacity in stroke prevention and management through initiatives outlined in the provincial stroke strategy. Under the leadership of the foundation, the strategy continues to make steady progress – five current priority areas include:

- Rapid TIA Assessment - ensuring that individuals who have experienced a Transient Ischemic Attack (TIA or mini stroke) and are discharged from emergency rooms are rapidly followed-up on in the community;
- Telestroke – applying state of the art telehealth applications to stroke care in order to better serve rural and remote communities, especially in the areas of stroke diagnosis and treatment;
- ER Stroke/TIA Protocols – reinforcing the understanding and uptake of these critical treatment protocols by all health care providers in all emergency rooms across the province;
- Rehabilitation and Community Integration – utilizing rehabilitation experts to develop a comprehensive provincial plan to present to government in order to improve and expand rehabilitation services across the province;
- Measurement and Evaluation – developing measures and methods for evaluating the performance of BC's overall stroke care system as well as the results of the above priority initiatives.

The Heart and Stroke Foundation, a volunteer-based health charity, leads in eliminating heart disease and stroke and reducing their impact through the advancement of research and its application, the promotion of healthy living, and advocacy.

Media contact: Michelle Stewart
Communications Director
Ministry of Health
250 812-5571 (cell)
250 952-1887 (media line)

Mark Collison
Director, Advocacy & Stakeholder Relations
Heart and Stroke Foundation of BC & Yukon
250 592-8040

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