

Every Day Is a World Stroke Day: Act Now, Be a Stroke Champion and a Torchbearer! Markku Kaste

Stroke. 2010;41:2449-2450; originally published online October 14, 2010;
doi: 10.1161/STROKEAHA.110.599092

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Print ISSN: 0039-2499. Online ISSN: 1524-4628

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Every Day Is a World Stroke Day Act Now, Be a Stroke Champion and a Torchbearer!

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Stroke is the second leading cause of death worldwide, and more people die because of stroke than because of AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria put together. However, the heaviest burden incurred by stroke is not death but severe disability of which stroke is the leading cause. The panorama gets even darker because 85% of all strokes occur in developing countries^{1,2} with limited resources for stroke care. This means that the majority of stroke patients do not have access to stroke unit care, rehabilitation, and evidence-based secondary prevention. The most effective way to reduce the burden of stroke is primary and secondary prevention, and we know the risk factors for stroke. The same 10 risk factors are associated with 90% of the risk of stroke in high-, middle-, and low-income countries.³ For most of them there are effective therapies, so why is it that what we know does not translate into what we do?

The World Stroke Day (WSD) aims at reducing the burden of stroke. The theme for the year 2010 is: One in Six: Act Now! underlining the fact that 1 in 6 people experience a stroke during his/her lifetime. Stroke is a common disorder. Every other second someone experiences a stroke and every sixth second someone dies of a stroke. Stroke spares no age, sex, ethnic origin, or country—it could be you or your beloved one. A global stroke initiative is needed to reduce the enormous human suffering and costs incurred by stroke. We must fight the old nihilism that in stroke nothing can be done. The first step in this war against stroke is a call to arms to distribute evidence-based information worldwide that stroke can be prevented and it is possible to recover from it, and the means how to do it.

In Europe, the European Stroke Initiative (EUSI) launched the WSD in the nineties. The original idea of the EUSI was to make it a worldwide campaign, but due to shortage of financial resources the Steering Committee of the EUSI decided to implement the project only in Europe. The successor of the EUSI, the European Stroke Organisation (ESO) has continued the project. The WSD activities in Europe are organized by stroke support organizations together with national scientific societies, and the WSD is

celebrated annually on May 10th. However, good ideas are seldom born in one brain, one place, and at one time. In Canada, Dr Vladimir Hachinski had also the idea to initiate the WSD, and after preliminary work he, along with a working group, announced the WSD at the World Stroke Congress in Vancouver in 2004. The World Stroke Organization (WSO) continued on the path opened by Dr Hachinski and delivered the WSD proclamation at the World Stroke Congress in Cape Town in 2006. The WSD of the WSO is celebrated worldwide on October 29th.

The WSD Working Group of the WSO has initiated successful projects. Among them was the worldwide competition under the 2009 theme of the WSD: “Stroke, What Can I Do?”. Fifty-seven countries and regions took part in the competition. It was not an easy task to select the winners because most of the competitors had made an impressive job. The winners were selected based on their project’s reach, innovation, and message. The differences between the best were marginal and each of them would have deserved to receive a prize, but just as in Olympic Games the jury decided to give gold, silver, and bronze medals. The winners were Sri Lanka, Brazil, and Italy. Because of the high quality of the best competitors, the jury decided to give also 2 honorable mentions, which went to Guntur, India and Mumbai, India. It was excellent that most of the winners came from low- and middle-income countries where stroke incidence rates have exceeded those of high-income countries¹ and where the burden of stroke is the heaviest. This is a good sign and tells that where the burden of stroke is heaviest there are devoted people willing to work hard to fight it. The winners will receive their prizes at the World Stroke Congress in Seoul, South Korea in October. A new competition for 2010 is open, and those who either did not take part in the competition of 2009 or did so but did not win will have a new opportunity. Instructions can be found at the WSO website at www.world-stroke.org and at the World Stroke Campaign website at <http://www2.kenes.com/wsd2010/pages/home.aspx>.

Another ongoing competition of the WSD is to find a universal symbol for the WSD, which will be additional to the WSO logo. After getting the symbol, each of us can have a WSD pin on our jacket telling that we are soldiers in the war against stroke. The competition is open to everyone and the instructions can be found at the WSD and WSO websites.

The third ongoing project of the WSD Working Group is a search for Goodwill Ambassadors. The first one has already been found and nominated. He is Mr Alberto Contador, the 3-time winner of Tour de France. Alberto Contador is an outstanding example of a stroke survivor who did not give up but became a world-class champion and a cycling legend. This verifies that nothing is impossible if you set your mind

The opinions in this editorial are not necessarily those of the editors or of the American Heart Association.

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(*Stroke*. 2010;41:2449-2450.)

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Stroke is available at <http://stroke.ahajournals.org>
DOI: 10.1161/STROKEAHA.110.599092

to it. We are looking for more Goodwill Ambassadors around the world. If you know high profile people who are willing to use their visibility in reducing the burden of stroke, please contact us about his/her name and contact details.

For call to arms in the war against stroke, 1 day per year is not enough; we have to fight stroke 365 days per year. Therefore, the WSO will launch a 2-year stroke campaign at the World Stroke Congress in Seoul. Our 2 major challenges are: (1) how to ensure that what we know will translate into what we do in daily practice, and (2) how to educate the public on a healthier lifestyle worldwide in spite of cultural, social, and religious differences. It is our duty to act now so that we do not need to explain to our children and grandchildren why we did not work harder when there still was time. We have the means needed to reach our vision.⁴ The WSD Working Group encourages all of us to act as stroke champions and torchbearers in the fight against stroke. The dream of the WSD is that one day we can celebrate triumph over stroke. The day is not near but together we can make a difference and reduce the burden of stroke worldwide.

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KEY WORDS: World Stroke Day ■ World Stroke Campaign