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## Quick action key with strokes

By TERRY RINDFLEISCH / La Crosse Tribune

Kevin Kuchar and Rick Schuh, Tri-State Ambulance paramedics, respond to stroke emergencies regularly, and they often wish people would have called for help earlier.

"By the time we get a call, it can be too late," said Schuh, a paramedic for 10 years. "People need to call us as soon as they experience the first symptoms."

Kuchar, a paramedic for 26 years, said patients have a three-hour window from symptoms to treatment to survive the devastation of a stroke. And that includes time for tests such as CT scans.

"The key is rapidly accessing the system because time is of the essence," Kuchar said. "The second the first symptoms appear, dial 911. If you do that, it hugely increases the chances of a good outcome."

The paramedics said stroke symptoms include:

Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side.

Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding.

Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes.

Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination.

Sudden, severe headache with no known cause.

Kuchar and Schuh said people who see symptoms need to make a quick evaluation by using the FAST principles:

F: Face. Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop?

A: Arm. Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?

S: Speech. Ask the person to repeat a simple phrase. Does the speech sound slurred or strange?

T: Time. If you observe any of these signs, it is time to call 911.

Kuchar said many people have symptoms overnight and then wake up with a stroke. Kuchar said there are two types of strokes — bleeding or clotting — with a better chance of survival with a clotting event. A bleeding event, which can be accompanied by headaches and vision loss, is more

difficult to manage, he said.

Schuh said people should be aware that anyone, not only the elderly, can have a stroke.

According to the American Stroke Association, up to 80 percent of strokes are preventable by controlling risk factors such as high blood pressure, diabetes and atrial fibrillation, along with modifying lifestyle choices such as smoking, food, alcohol and exercise habits.

Annual stroke deaths have declined by 10,000 in recent years, but it is still the third leading cause of death, affecting 700,000 Americans every year. May is National Stroke Awareness Month.

"These days, as awareness increases, we have better outcomes," Kuchar said.

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### Screening

A stroke results from the disruption of adequate blood flow to the brain. The most common source of disruption is a significant narrowing or blockage of the carotid arteries, located in the neck, caused by excessive accumulation of fatty plaque buildup along the artery walls. The carotid arteries are the main blood supply to the brain, and plaque buildup in these arteries is the leading cause of stroke.

Franciscan Skemp Healthcare is offering a free, painless carotid artery screening from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. May 28. The screening uses ultrasound technology to provide images of the carotid arteries on both sides of the neck and measure the velocity of the blood flow through these vessels.

The screening is at the Chileda Conference Room, 1020 Mississippi St., La Crosse (former Chileda Building). Call (608) 392-9717 for an appointment.

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