



THE STROKE AID SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER - JULY/AUGUST 2007

Hi everyone

The 22nd AGM went off very well, the Committee were re-elected *en bloc*, and the entertainment was superb. Barbara Shapiro, a well-know soprano delighted the members and visitors with song and various arias from *Carmen*, *the Merry Widow* and others. Those who did not manage to attend missed a splendid morning.

The work to renovate and upgrade the Therapy room has begun and we hope to be able to move into the new office during October if all goes well.

NEWS OF MEMBERS:

SYBIL MILLS suffered a heart attack whilst on a trip to the Arctic. She has recovered and was well enough to attend the Annual General Meeting. TREVOR REES was in ICU but is now back home with Laura. ECKIE FRIEDMAN is undergoing tests in the Rosebank Clinic. DORIN FERMO has had a Hip replacement. We wish you all improved health and may you go from strength to strength.

OBITUARIES:

We are very sorry to report the death of one of our older members, Mrs Billie Stickels. She was 92 years old – what a wonderful age to have reached! Her friends at the Tuesday meetings will sadly miss her. Our deepest sympathies to her family and friends.

NUTS ABOUT CHOLESTEROL:

Pistachios can significantly reduce cholesterol and help prevent narrowing of the arteries, research suggests. A trial showed that volunteers who ate 85g of the nuts a day for one month lowered their total blood cholesterol by 8.4%. *The Times, London*

DITCH THAT DIET:

Diets do not work for most people and could even jeopardise their health, one of the largest studies of weight loss has indicated. The Times reports that research by the University of California shows that many dieters put weight straight back on, increasing the risk of heart attacks, strokes and diabetes. *Sunday Times Health*

DONATIONS:

We thank FRED JONES for the donation of a Wheelchair and Walker. We do appreciate your kindness and apologise that the letters of thanks that were sent did not reach you.

AN EXERCISE IN CARING:

Neither bad weather nor her own aches and pains will stop MAVIS TSHABALALA from her work with disabled people. For the past 10 years, Mavis, of Dube Village, Soweto has travelled once a week to the Soweto Home for the Aged where she runs the Soweto branch of Stroke Aid, a support group.

There, Mavis puts some 21 people through their paces in activities such as handwork, games, exercises, singing and discussion. The group works closely with the Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital and the WITS Medical School. Mavis, who has six grandchildren, was an occupational therapist assistant at Baragwanath Hospital for 32 years. She then worked at the Old Age home for four years before she was asked to help with Stroke Aid – “so I had to leave my “oldies”, she says. But she is now firmly attached to her Stroke Aid friends. “They are so devoted – even if it’s raining, they want to be fetched”, she comments fondly.

She is helped by Albert Mogale of Dobsonville, who had a stroke in 1990, when he was 25. Albert, who was once unable to move, now leads the exercise sessions, and says of Mavis: “She is a great motivator – everyone must walk”.

“Her faithfulness over the years has been remarkable”, says Ursula Gittings, a past chairman of Stroke Aid Johannesburg. “Her tenacity, commitment, generosity and her constant positive attitude are amazing. Mavis has never allowed setbacks, such as years of transport problems, to get her down. Often, she would have to sit in the bus for four hours a day as members, scattered around Soweto were picked up early in the morning and then dropped home in the afternoon, so that the group could spend one or two hours together”.

Mavis sings in the Dube Methodist Church choir and is also a member of the Black Housewives League.

*The article above was published in the **Prime Club Magazine in 2003**. Mavis has carried on with her stirring work for Stroke Aid at the Soweto Old Age home but says the time has come for her to retire and she is looking for someone to take her place. She says she will continue to help until someone suitable is found. Thank you, Mavis for your years of dedicated service. We have put the word out and we hope you find someone soon so that you can do all the other things that you enjoy!*

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**WEIZMANN RESEARCHERS
DEVELOP TECHNIQUE FOR
“BRAIN CLEANING” by Judy
Siegel
Shirley Abrams, now living in Israel,
sent this article to us.**

Treatment of brain injuries may become easier with the development of a new method at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot that the US FDA has assured a fast track to approval.

Trauma to the brain, a stroke or disease causes cells to die when a

substance called glutamate floods the surrounding cells, setting off a chain reaction that damages whole swathes of tissue. Glutamate is always present in the brain, where it carries nerve impulses across the gaps between cells.

But when this chemical is released by damaged or dying brain cells, the result is over-excitation of nearby cells, killing them.

A new method for ridding the brain of excess glutamate has been developed at the institute. This method takes a completely new approach to the problem, compared with previous attempts based on drugs that must enter the brain to prevent the deleterious action of glutamate. Many drugs, however, can't cross the blood-brain barrier into the brain, while other promising treatments have proved ineffective in clinical trials.

Professor Vivian Teichberg of the institute's neurobiology department, working together with Professor Yoram Shapira and Dr Alexander Zlotnick of the Soroka Medical Centre and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, has shown that in rats an enzyme in the blood can be activated to "mop up" toxic glutamate spills in the brain and prevent much of the damage. This method may soon be entering clinical trials to see if it can do the same for humans.

Though the brain has its own means of recycling glutamate, injury causes the system to malfunction, leading to glutamate build-up. Teichberg, reasoned that this problem could be circumvented by passing glutamate from the fluid surrounding brain cells into the bloodstream.

But first, he had to have a clear understanding of the mechanism for moving glutamate from the brain to the blood.

Glutamate concentrations are several times higher in the blood than in the brain, and the body must be able to pump the chemical "upstream".

Glutamate pumps, called transporters, are found on the outside of blood vessels, on cells that come into contact with the brain. These collect glutamate, creating small zones of high concentration from which the glutamate can then be released into the bloodstream.

Basic chemistry told him that he could affect the transporter activity by tweaking glutamate levels in the blood. When blood levels are low, the greater difference in concentrations causes the brain to release more glutamate into the bloodstream. He uses an enzyme called *GOT* that is normally present in blood to bind glutamate chemically and inactivate it, effectively lowering levels in the blood and kicking transporter activity into high gear.

In their experiments, Teichberg and his colleagues used this method to scavenge blood glutamate in rats with simulated traumatic brain injury. They found that glutamate cleared out of the animals' brains effectively, and the damage was prevented.

Yeda, the technology transfer arm of the Weizmann Institute, now holds a patent for this method, and a new company based on this patent called "Braitact Ltd" has been set up in Kiryat Shmona and is currently

operating within the framework of Meytav's Technological Incubator base.

If all goes well Stage 1 Clinical trials are planned for the near future.

The method could potentially be used to treat such acute brain insults as head traumas and stroke, and prevent brain and nerve damage from bacterial meningitis or nerve gas. It may also have an impact on chronic diseases such as glaucoma,

amy-trophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) or HIV dementia.

"Our method may work where others have failed," said Teichberg, "because rather than temporarily blocking the glutamate's toxic action with drugs inside the brain, it clears the chemical away from the brain into the blood, where it can't do harm anymore". *The Jerusalem Post*

JUNK AND FATTY FOODS PUT AFRICAN HEARTS AT RISK

A growing number of African men and women are eating themselves to death by bingeing on fatty, deep-fried junk food. This was one of the findings of a recent study by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of South Africa (HSFSA). The report also debunks the myth that Africans are immune to cardio-vascular disease.

Other findings include:

- Actuarial projections suggest that heart disease and other chronic diseases will have increased by 2010;
- There is a 41% increase in premature heart-related deaths expected between 2007 and 2030;
- Currently more than half of the deaths in South Africa attributed to heart disease occur in individuals younger than 65 years old;
- Poor lifestyle choices were the primary cause of growing heart disease in South Africa across all demographic sectors;
- The pattern of deaths differs greatly among blacks and whites, with blacks reflecting a pattern of death caused by stroke, disease of the heart muscle and high blood pressure, while whites mainly reflect a pattern of death caused by heart attacks;
- Everybody – from unborn babies to inactive teenagers and women – is in danger from the risk factors associated with cardiovascular disease.

Dr Lucas Ntyintyane, a research fellow at the Soweto Cardiovascular Research Unit at Chris Hani-Baragwanath Hospital's cardiology department, said Black South Africans have become couch potatoes with a high-fat diet.

"A change in lifestyle, urbanization, westernization of culture, and industrialization, has contributed to the growing number of black people suffering from heart-related diseases.

Even those in rural areas have become victims by supporting junk food outlets in the areas," says Ntyintyane. He said in 1994 Baragwanath Hospital treated 55 black patients with heart conditions, as opposed to one in 1960 and 14 in 1976.

According to a report released this week, 'Heart Disease in South Africa', by Professor Krisela Steyn of the University of Cape Town's Department of Medicine, about 195 South Africans die each day from heart disease. *Taschica Pillay – Sunday Times*

Take care,

Yvonne Thomé



SECRETARY

PS. Fighting with my computer – I can't find my Ladybird

Grateful thanks to Postnet, The Glen Shopping Centre, who printed this issue of the newsletter as a donation to Stroke Aid