Women Know Little About Stroke

In a survey, few women could name the primary stroke symptoms, and many weren’t concerned about experiencing a stroke in their lifetimes. Commissioned by HealthyWomen, the National Stroke Association, and the American College of Emergency Physicians, the online survey of about 2,000 adult women found that only 27% of women could name more than two of the six primary stroke symptoms (sudden numbness or weakness on one side of the face; sudden numbness or weakness in an arm or leg; sudden confusion, trouble speaking, or understanding speech; sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination; sudden severe headache with no known cause). Only about 30% were aware that women are at higher risk for stroke than men. “The results of this survey underscore what we see too often with women when it comes to dealing with their unique health issues,” Elizabeth Battaglino Cahill, executive director of HealthyWomen, said in a statement. “As they put the health of family members and everyone else first, they often underestimate their own risks and ignore warning signs of serious health problems like stroke.” The biotech company Genentech Inc. provided support for the survey.

Osteoporosis Screening Increases

The percentage of women aged 65 and older being screened for osteoporosis has risen dramatically in recent years, according to data from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. From 2001 to 2006, the percentage of that Medicare population reporting being screened rose from 14% to 64%. The increase occurred among all racial, ethnic, and income groups. However, the rise was most pronounced among white and Hispanic women. Among white women on Medicare, reports of osteoporosis screening climbed from 36% in 2001 to 67% in 2006. Among Hispanic women on Medicare, screening increased from 22% to 55%. Black women on Medicare had a screening increase from 16% to 38%. The data come from the agency’s 2009 National Healthcare Disparities Report.

State’s Abortion Law Challenged

The Center for Reproductive Rights is seeking to overturn a new Oklahoma law that requires a woman seeking an abortion to first have an ultrasound and whose image is then shown to her by a physician. The Center for Reproductive Rights says the law intrudes on patient privacy. Although Oklahoma is not the first state to require that an ultrasound be performed before an abortion, its law is the most extreme, the center charged, because it requires a physician to describe the image in detail, even if the woman objects. The law also offers no exemption for victims of rape or incest.

“Politicians have no business making medical decisions,” center staff attorney Stephanie Toti said in a statement. The Oklahoma legislature triggered the ultrasound requirement in April by overriding a veto by Gov. Brad Henry (D). At the same time, another veto override made it impossible for Oklahoma women and their families to sue a physician who withholds information about a fetal abnormality.

New Stem Cell Lines Okayed

Officials at the National Institutes of Health have approved an additional 13 human embryonic stem cell lines for research supported by federal funding. The lines have also been added to the NIH stem cell registry, which now includes 64 lines eligible for federal research funding. Another 100 lines are pending approval at the NIH. Four of the new stem cell lines were originally approved during the George W. Bush administration, and two of those lines have been widely used by researchers, according to the announcement. NIH Director Francis S. Collins said the approval of these older lines should provide reassurance to many researchers. “Scientists can continue their studies without interruption, and we can all be assured that valuable work will not be lost,” Dr. Collins said in a statement. In March 2009, President Obama issued an executive order removing some previous barriers to federal funding of stem cell research.

Abortion Rate High Among Poor

In 2008, the abortion rate among poor women was more than twice that of women in higher income brackets, according to a report from the Guttmacher Institute. And the proportion of abortion patients who were poor increased from 27% in 2000 to 42% in 2008. The findings are from the institute’s national survey of abortion patients, which includes responses from more than 9,400 women who had abortions between April 2008 and May 2009. The results indicate that abortion is becoming more concentrated among women with incomes below the federal poverty level, according to the institute. The change may be due to both the economic recession and increased efforts by abortion providers to make services available to poor women, according to the report, available online at www.guttmacher.org/pubs/US-Abortion-Patients.pdf.