The REasons for Geographic And Racial Differences in Stroke (REGARDS) Study and the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS)

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Congratulations to the REGARDS investigators on this initial report of results from this large and growing population-based study of stroke in the United States. The findings are not novel, showing what has been demonstrated previously in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES): that control of high blood pressure is not as frequent in blacks as in whites despite more frequent recognition and treatment of hypertension. Agreement with this previous study serves to validate REGARDS and to make more credible future results about stroke in the United States, especially in the stroke buckle and belt, which remain unexplained by the current analyses.

Congratulations also to NINDS. Usually such studies involving careful follow-up of large populations of people come from other National Institutes of Health (NIH) institutes: for example, the Framingham Heart Study, the Cardiovascular Health Study (CHS), and the Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities Study (ARIC). These epidemiologic studies and others are designed to ferret out the causes of vascular diseases including stroke. Such an understanding allows for the possibility of prevention by controlling etiologic risk factors, even without a complete understanding of pathophysiology. Although some might argue with the definitions used in REGARDS, none could deny the opportunity identified by this work to prevent stroke in all Americans, but especially blacks. Overall, blood pressure is controlled in only about half of those with hypertension.

The REGARDS investigators are fast realizing their ambitious plan to recruit and follow 30,000 people: 11,701 participants were included in this report, and 21,140 participants had been recruited as of January 1, 2006, according to the study website (http://www.soph.uab.edu/default.aspx?id=114). The study should become an invaluable resource for all those involved in the possibility of prevention by controlling etiologic risk factors, even without a complete understanding of pathophysiology. Although some might argue with the definitions used in REGARDS, none could deny the opportunity identified by this work to prevent stroke in all Americans, but especially blacks. Overall, blood pressure is controlled in only about half of those with hypertension.

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