

World Stroke Day

Markku Kaste, MD, PhD

The World Stroke Day (WSD) is celebrated annually on October 29th. The aim of it is to encourage us each to join the global fight against stroke. Every other second, an adult or a child, a man or a woman, old or young, suffers a stroke. Furthermore, every sixth second, someone dies because of stroke. If a stroke victim survives, he/she is often severely disabled for the rest of his/her life. Stroke causes a major loss of quality-adjusted life years, and does it most often in developing countries. Also, 85% of strokes occur in persons with low or moderate risk factors—it can be you or me. What can we do to prevent it? Back in the early 1970s, Finland held the unquestionable world record of having the highest incidence of stroke in men and the second highest in women according to the World Health Organization's MONICA project. Then the North Karelia project was launched, and in the 1980s, incidence and mortality of stroke started to decline in Finland—and they keep on declining.

Most strokes occur in developing countries with limited financial resources. How can they afford to fight against stroke? The annual WSD competition has revealed that it is possible, and furthermore, it is possible to do it effectively. Based on the competition, it even looks like it can be done better in developing countries than in many wealthy countries. More than 60 countries and regions took part in the WSD competition of 2009. Winners were selected based on innovation, message, and reach of the activities executed. The same criteria were used when ranking the 2010 WSD competition, in which about the same amount of countries and regions took part. Winners of WSD 2010 were Guntur, India; Hungary; and Nigeria, and the 3 honorable mentions went to Bengal, India; Russia; and Kerala, India.

In both competitions, campaigners worked hard at the grassroots level. They organized information campaigns in newspapers, radios, and TVs, and delivered lectures for professionals and laypeople about how to prevent and treat



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stroke. They successfully invited ministers to join these activities and founded stroke societies and stroke support organizations. It is amazing how innovative, energetic, and active these foot soldiers in the war against stroke had been. We know for a fact that such activities were executed also in many other regions that did not take part in the WSD competitions. Obviously they thought that what matters most is what you do locally whether people around the world know about it. The best thing about the 2 WSD competitions is the fact that most of the winners came from developing countries. Their activities verify that hard work to reduce the burden of stroke can be done anywhere in the world.

The success of the WSD competitions has shown that it is possible to fight against stroke worldwide. This should encourage us all to follow the examples of the winners of the WSD competitions. If you have not yet done it, now is the time to join the forces in the fight against stroke. Just look in the mirror and you will see the one who should take this challenge.

Disclosures

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