HISPANICS IN BORDER STATES
30 PERCENT MORE LIKELY TO DIE FROM "BRAIN ATTACKS;
ACCORDING TO NEW RESEARCH

Hispanics on Border May Be Waiting Too Long
to Get Treated for Stroke;
Study by Dr. Ameer Hassan of Valley Baptist-Harlingen
presented at International Stroke Conference

HARLINGEN – New research shows that Hispanics in the Valley and elsewhere along the Mexican border are less likely to receive medications to treat strokes and 30 percent more likely to die from “brain attacks” than non-Hispanic patients.

The research, which was conducted by six neurologists -- including Dr. Ameer Hassan and Dr. Wondwossen Tekle with Valley Baptist Medical Center in Harlingen -- suggests that Hispanics in border states may be waiting too long to come to the hospital for treatment of stroke, which is similar to a heart attack – except to the brain.

A stroke is a medical emergency in which it is critical to call 911 immediately after the patient first experiences symptoms. The longer the patient waits before going to the hospital, the more brain tissue will die – meaning such patients could become permanently disabled or die.
“Our research suggests that many Hispanic patients along the border may be ‘sleeping on a stroke’ – figuring that they will feel better in the morning,” Dr. Hassan said. “As a result, they are not getting to the hospital in time to be treated with the stroke-reversing medication tPA in the Emergency Room.”

At most Valley hospitals, treatment with the tPA “clot buster” medication is limited to within 3 to 4.5 hours after the initial onset of symptoms of a stroke. However, Valley Baptist in Harlingen has extended the time window by introducing new endovascular stroke procedures in a specially-equipped “bi-plane” neurovascular angiography suite in the cardiac catheterization laboratory. At Valley Baptist-Harlingen, stroke patients can be treated with tPA through a catheter or with retrievable metal “stent” devices up to 8 hours or more after symptoms begin.

“This enables us to double the time window for treatment – and to treat many more stroke victims,” Dr. Hassan said. “Basically, we are giving people a chance – people who otherwise would have poor outcomes after a stroke. But of course it’s still critical to get to the hospital as soon as possible – the sooner treatment begins, the more brain cells we can save.”

Valley Baptist is the only hospital south of San Antonio with two specially-trained endovascular neurologists who are able to provide 24-hour coverage for patients needing specialized treatment for stroke in a bi-plane neurovascular angiography suite. As a result, the hospital has been treating stroke patients who are transferred from other hospitals as far away as Corpus Christi and Rio Grande City.

“Before Valley Baptist introduced endovascular stroke procedures to the Valley in 2012, we were only able to treat 3 to 5 percent of our patients with the stroke-reversing medication,” Dr. Hassan said. “Now we are able to treat up to 30 percent of the patients -- by taking many of them to the cath lab, if they come in too late to be treated in the Emergency Room.”

The treatment helps to clear blockages in the blood vessels leading to a patient’s brain -- allowing blood and oxygen to once again reach the brain. In many cases, this can help save the patient’s life and prevent or minimize disabilities from the stroke.

Dr. Hassan’s research looked at several recent studies and 2011 data from a nationwide sample of 34,904 Hispanic patients who were admitted to hospitals with ischemic stroke. Of 21,130 Hispanic stroke patients in states along the Mexican border (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California), only 4.8 percent were able to receive treatment with stroke-reversing “thrombolytic” medications, compared to 5.7 percent of non-Hispanic patients in those states.

“After adjusting for age, gender, and other confounding risk factors, Hispanics were 30% more likely to suffer in-hospital mortality versus their non-Hispanic counter-parts in border states,” Dr. Hassan and his fellow researchers stated. “This disparity was not apparent in the non-border states.”
The research on Hispanic stroke patients was presented at the American Stroke Association’s recent “International Stroke Conference” in San Diego, California, and highlighted by the American Heart Association in the “News Tips” section of their website.

Dr. Hassan serves as Clinical Director of Endovascular Surgical Neuroradiology and Neurocritical Care and Clinical Neuroscience Research at Valley Baptist, as well as Assistant Professor of Neurology and Radiology with the University of Texas School of Health Sciences-San Antonio. He has authored or co-authored more than 50 articles in national medical journals.

Along with Dr. Hassan and Dr. Tekle, two other physicians are serving Valley stroke patients at the Valley Baptist Brain and Spine Network - Dr. Victoria Parada, Board-Certified Vascular Neurologist and Clinical Director of Neurosciences and the Stroke Program at Valley Baptist-Harlingen, and Dr. Felix Rivera, Neurologist.

Dr. Hassan said it’s critical for Valley residents to learn the warning signs of stroke -- and to call 911 immediately if they or their loved one experiences symptoms. Residents should use the “FAST” method for responding to a possible stroke, according to the American Stroke Association:

- **FACE**: Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop?
- **ARMS**: Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?
- **SPEECH**: Ask the person to repeat a simple phrase. Is their speech slurred or strange?
- **TIME**: If you observe any of these signs, call 9-1-1 immediately.

Only 15 percent of stroke victims reach the hospital within the first three hours after stroke symptoms, according to statistics from the American Stroke Association. Every minute spent without treatment means more brain cells die.

Dr. Hassan stressed that Valley Baptist has a committed stroke team willing to make every effort “to help our patients to restore functioning and prevent disability.”

For more information about prevention and treatment for stroke, consult your physician and visit www.ValleyBaptist.net.
ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Dr. Hassan said it's important for Valley residents to know the following warning signs of stroke and teach them to others – because with stroke, every second counts:

- **Sudden** numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg – especially on one side of the body
- **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

The research on Hispanic stroke patients, “Are there Disparities in Thrombolytic Treatment and Mortality in Acute Ischemic Stroke in the Hispanic Population Living in Border States Versus Non-Border States?” was conducted by neurologists Ameer E. Hassan, DO; Malik M. Adil, MD; Taqi T. Zafar, MD; Muhammad Umair, MD; Wondwossen G Tekle, MD; and Adnan I. Qureshi, MD. Dr. Hassan's research on stroke was also featured during an International Congress of Interventional Neurology conference in Philadelphia in Oct. 2013, as well as at an International Stroke Conference in Hawaii in Feb. 2013. In addition, Dr. Hassan serves as the lead investigator for research that is continuing at Valley Baptist Medical Center-Harlingen on the use of an anti-platelet drug, Cilostazol, in the prevention of stroke. Valley Baptist is also a site for an international clinical trial on stroke treatment, the “SOCRATES” study to assess the prevention of major vascular events (stroke, heart attack and death) in patients with acute ischemic stroke or “mini-strokes” (transient ischemic attacks); as well as the “SHINE” clinical trial on stroke.
About Valley Baptist Health System

Valley Baptist Health System is an 866-bed faith-based regional health system located in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. It is focused on helping people achieve health for life through compassionate service inspired by faith.

Valley Baptist extends many of its services beyond its facilities and into local communities, offering free screenings for the community, support groups and numerous educational opportunities. For more information, visit www.ValleyBaptist.net (and www.FaceBook.com/ValleyBaptistMedicalCenter).
TREATMENT FOR “BRAIN ATTACKS” - Dr. Ameer Hassan, left, an Endovascular Neurologist, has published medical research indicating that Hispanics along the Mexican border are 30 percent more likely to die from stroke or “brain attacks” than non-Hispanic patients. Above, Dr. Hassan performs a procedures to treat a stroke in a specially-equipped biplane lab / neurovascular angiography suite at Valley Baptist Medical Center in Harlingen.