

Our Community

A newsletter produced by the Department of Community Health and Education at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center

A Different Journey: Young Stroke Survivors Rebuild Lives

David Bellamy was 26 when he suffered a stroke that left him with weakness on his left side and short-term memory difficulties. Three years later, he is still putting his life back together.

When Bellamy sought a support group for stroke survivors in West Los Angeles a couple of years ago, most of the people in the room were in their 70s and 80s. "There was very little I could relate to. For young people, having a stroke is a very isolating event," he says.

But now, thanks to his own initiative, he has a place to go where he can talk freely with others who understand what it means to be faced with a disabling health crisis in the prime of their lives. Bellamy was instrumental in organizing the "One Stroke Ahead: Young Person's Stroke Support Group" at Cedars-Sinai.

The group, open to any stroke survivor between ages 18 and 55, meets on the third Thursday of the month from 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. in Cedars-Sinai's Rehabilitation Unit. The Medical

Center also offers a monthly stroke support group called "Yes I Can" for survivors of all ages. It meets on the second Thursday of each month from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. in the Rehabilitation Unit.

Bellamy, who has had epilepsy since birth and suffered his stroke during a brain test that was performed at another hospital as part of an effort to stop his seizures, says it has been "very rewarding" to share experiences with other young stroke survivors. "We're all working to improve our lives as much as we can, but we're on a different journey than we were on before. It really helps to empathize and encourage each other," he says.

After he suffered his stroke, Bellamy went through physical rehabilitation and occupational and speech therapy. He now works at Trader Joe's® and is taking college courses as he prepares

to enter a master's program to become a pharmacist.

Both of the stroke survivor support groups at Cedars-Sinai are led by Terri Lukomski, a certified therapeutic recreation specialist (CTRS). Bellamy met Lukomski when he went to a meeting of "Yes I Can." He expressed his desire to talk with stroke survivors closer to his age, and she followed up to establish a group that she says has become a "place where young survivors can find a common ground, a common voice and ear, and a normalized social environment."

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Top row, left to right: Terri Lukomski, David Bellamy
Bottom row, left to right: Jennifer Errande, Gregory Traylor, Derek VanOss

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Listen. Learn. Take action.

This is what we do at Cedars-Sinai, on an ongoing basis, as we identify community health needs and deliver a wide range of services and support to underserved populations in the community. While most of

our community health programs are based on needs identified in our triennial comprehensive review of the community's health status, we are equally receptive to great ideas that stem from the experiences of motivated individuals.

For example, we listened when David Bellamy, a stroke survivor in his 20s, shared his concern after attending a meeting of our "Yes I Can" support group for stroke survivors. Most of the people in the support group were much older than David, and he wanted to connect with peers who could relate more directly to the struggles he was facing. So the group's leader, Terri Lukomski, worked with him to create a separate support group for young stroke survivors, which has become a model for hospitals across the country.

As you read David's story in this issue of *Embracing Our Community*, you'll see how we combine forces with people in the community in ways that help them become stronger.

We also partner with a wide range of organizations—including schools, synagogues and churches, local government and law enforcement agencies, senior centers, and health and human service programs—to help them develop programs and services that promote better health in their communities. For example, Cedars-Sinai's involvement as a partner often helps schools and organizations gain an edge in the process of obtaining grants to expand resources for their community health projects.

We provide knowledge, expertise, manpower and resources to help our partners achieve their goals. A crucial part of our role is to listen carefully to what they have to say, because they know best what their community needs. We're very grateful for our community partners, as well as for individuals like David Bellamy, who challenge us to listen, learn and take action that can result in long-term improvements in the health of our community.

Sincerely,

Thomas M. Priselac
President and Chief Executive Officer

In 45 Different Languages, Interpreters Bridge Barriers

Jim Harvill lived overseas for 15 years—in Spain and Japan—and he remembers how uneasy he felt when he sought medical care in a setting where little or no English was spoken. He was still learning to speak Spanish and Japanese and did not have the help of interpreters when he needed them, so it is satisfying for him to be able to provide this service to Cedars-Sinai patients through his job in the Interpreter Services Department.

"I have a lot of empathy for patients who don't speak English because I know how it feels to be thrust into a system that is unknown. It can be very intimidating," says Harvill, who translates mostly for Spanish-speaking patients, but can also assist those who speak Japanese.

"I try to help them navigate through the system," he adds. "And if someone is using 'doctor speak,' I'll stop and try to get the physician to use simpler terms so that the patient will be able to understand what I am translating."

Harvill is one of 12 professional interpreters dedicated to bridging language barriers between patients and healthcare professionals. Interpreters are available at any time, any day of the week, in 45 different languages. Spanish, Russian and Farsi are the ones most often translated, followed by Korean and Hebrew. Interpreters are also available to translate rarer languages such as Basque, as well as to help patients who communicate through American Sign Language.

"Cedars-Sinai has long provided this service and has enough interpreters representing enough languages to ensure that patients and healthcare professionals are able to communicate effectively. We see this as a crucial part of providing quality care," says Michael Roberts, RN, director of Nursing Resources/Night and Weekend Hospital Operations.

In addition to its professional staff, the Interpreter Services Department has about 150 bilingual hospital employees who have gone through special training to learn how to interpret in a medical environment. They volunteer their services as needed.

Interpreter Services handles about 5,000 requests per month and translates about 200 documents each year, including everything from menus to patient education materials and standard forms used throughout the medical center. Interpreters participate in more than 20,000 hours of community service every year at events such as health fairs, flu clinics and blood drives.



Patients who don't speak English can just point the arrow on this printed disk to their native language, and the right interpreter will be provided.

Step by Step, Parents Learn Healthy Habits

Alicia Ramirez has a five-year-old son who will not eat vegetables, and she also struggles to get her two daughters, ages one-and-a-half and seven, to eat a well-balanced diet. The 26-year-old Los Angeles resident's concern that her children may not be getting the nutrients they need led her to sign up for Cedars-Sinai's Healthy Habits for Families workshop, which teaches parents how to make healthy choices for their families.

The free, 10-week program, which serves Los Angeles schools where at least 75 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-fee lunches—is now being offered at the 24th Street Elementary, Crescent Heights, Arlington Heights and Cienega elementary schools.

Ramirez discovered something surprising after the first one-hour session of a morning workshop that started at the 24th Street school. Workshop leader Claudia Gutierrez, Community Health Liaison, assigned the

16 mothers in the class to keep a daily food diary. After doing this assignment for a week, Ramirez saw a pattern—"I learned I wasn't eating as many vegetables as I'm supposed to," she says.

Now she is trying to set a good example for her children by improving her own diet as well as theirs. "I'm making sure my kids are drinking more water and eating more fruits and vegetables, and we're walking more," she adds.

This is just what Gutierrez wants to hear. During each class, she offers many practical tips that help parents see how simple steps toward a healthier lifestyle can make a big difference. She brings nutritious snacks such as yogurt and raw vegetables for participants to sample and maintains a lively dialogue with parents throughout each session, going back and forth from Spanish to English as she offers both information and encouragement.

During the recent class at the 24th Street Elementary school, Gutierrez offers examples of healthy choices from each of the main food groups,



A Healthy Habits for Families workshop led by Claudia Gutierrez

noting that buying frozen products is a good option for those who can't afford fresh fruits and vegetables. The class discussion reveals that planning ahead is a challenge for these busy parents. Gutierrez urges them to resist the quick solution—unhealthy fast food—and to develop menus, shop in advance for the week's meals and cook more than enough so they can freeze leftovers.

Gutierrez hands out pedometers, which measures how far you walk, and asks the workshop participants to write down the number of steps they walk each day. She suggests they keep moving as much as possible, and even walk in place while watching television.

At the end of the session, she urges the parents to wear their pedometers and gradually work up to at least 10,000 steps a day. Every step counts, Gutierrez stresses. Whether it is walking up the stairs instead of taking the elevator or eating carrots instead of chips, every step toward a healthier lifestyle makes a difference.



Parents graduating from Healthy Habits for Families

Model Program Improves Children's Health

When public-health educators from around the world gathered in San Diego last fall to share innovative ideas at the American Public Health Association's (APHA) annual meeting, Cedars-Sinai's Healthy Habits for Kids program was among those featured as models of "best practices."

"This gathering of 13,000 public-health professionals is the largest meeting of its kind, and it was an honor to be selected to make a poster presen-

tation on this program," says Joyce Culwell, MSPH, who oversees Healthy Habits for Kids and attended the APHA meeting.

The poster presentation—developed by Culwell and Cindy Levey, MPH, senior consultant in Community Health—described Cedars-Sinai's strategic focus on reducing the risks and impacts of obesity and inactivity. It also provided a detailed description of the Healthy Habits for Kids program,

which involves 10 weeks of instruction in elementary schools. The curriculum is designed to help children and their families improve their eating and exercise habits.

"Many of the public-health educators who viewed our poster presentation seemed very impressed by the way we are partnering with schools to help teach children how to make healthy food choices," Culwell says.

Grants Fund Facelift for Mobile Van that Delivers Quality Medical Care

Cedars-Sinai's two mobile medical units are familiar—and welcome—sights at schools, churches, homeless shelters and other locations in some of Los Angeles County's neediest neighborhoods.

Many people who depend on the COACH for Kids and Their Families® program (COACH stands for Community Outreach Assistance for Children's Health) are sure to appreciate the major improvements that have recently been made on these compact, fully-equipped medical offices on wheels—thanks to grants from the Ahmanson Foundation.

The Foundation recently donated \$125,000 to COACH, and these funds have made it possible for both of the medical units to be refurbished inside and out, with improvements ranging from renovated exam rooms to mechanical repairs and new tires. Both vans have been painted with colorful artwork that features children running and playing.

"The Ahmanson Foundation has been extremely generous, and these grants will help us keep our mobile medical units up-to-date so we can provide the highest quality healthcare for the community," says Michele Rigsby Pauley, RN, MSN, CPNP and program manager for COACH.

Each COACH mobile medical unit is staffed by a team of health and social service professionals from Cedars-Sinai. They provide free primary and preventive healthcare services for low-income and medically underserved children and their families. These services include physical exams; immunizations and tuberculosis screenings; hearing, vision and dental screenings; treatment for minor illnesses; developmental screenings; blood lead and anemia screenings; and referrals to Cedars-Sinai or partnering community clinics.



Renovated Mobile Medical Unit

"A Different Journey" Continued from page 1

Lukomski recently made a presentation about the group during a national convention of the American Therapeutic Recreation Association in Reno. "There are not many support groups like this, and ours has become a model for hospitals across the country," she says.

During a recent meeting of the "One Stroke Ahead" group, there was a long discussion about the difficulties young survivors face as they try to reenter the job market. A 37-year-old teacher who suffered a stroke seven years ago told the group he was worried about not being able to shake hands at the start of a job interview because his stroke left him with limited use of his right arm and hand. He received advice such as "don't worry about what others think" and "stay positive" from Bellamy and other stroke survivors ranging in age from 26 to 52.

They also talked about issues such as their struggle to regain their

independence despite physical and mental disabilities, and their desire to continue improving to a point well beyond what anyone expects of them.

"Although stroke is the third leading cause of death and the number one cause of adult disability, people tend to be uninformed about the impact this can have on your life," says David Palestrant, MD, who is director of Neuro-Critical Care and the Stroke Program at Cedars-Sinai. "It's great to see these young people sharing their experiences and learning from each other as they cope with a variety of emotional and physical challenges."

Dr. Palestrant heads one of the largest stroke programs in Southern California. The Cedars-Sinai Stroke Program offers the expertise of nationally recognized physicians and surgeons, 24-hour coverage, and comprehensive services that include prevention, diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation, research and patient support, as well as community

education programs emphasizing prevention and early recognition of symptoms.

The Joint Commission recently certified Cedars-Sinai as a Primary Stroke Center, a prestigious distinction that recognizes the Medical Center's commitment to following national standards and guidelines that can significantly improve outcomes for stroke patients.

For more information about Cedars-Sinai's Stroke Program, please visit www.cedars-sinai.edu/stroke.

To learn more about the "One Stroke Ahead" and "Yes I Can" support groups, please contact Terri Lukomski at (310) 423-6358.