

Stroke awareness focus of new program

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An elaborate information campaign by health-care researchers, school children and actors next month will educate adults in the Buffalo community about the warning signs of strokes.

Known as Agent S.A.M.: The Stroke Awareness Mission, the campaign will involve about 800 fourth and fifth graders from Buffalo public schools, who will learn stroke symptoms in an original play performed by the Theatre of Youth on Nov. 2-4, then take what they know to adults in at least four households.

Billboard and radio ads, and two day-long events at emergency medical sites will reinforce the program's message.

The program was designed by The Research Center for Stroke & Heart Disease of the Jacobs Neurological Institute through sponsorship by the AstraZeneca pharmaceutical company. The program cost \$500,000 to create and implement.

Getting the message out is critical for the region, said Shannon Carrow, institute executive director.

In 2000, the stroke death rate in Western New York was 23 percent higher than the rest of the nation and 79 percent higher than New York as a whole.

Despite the high incidence of stroke, about 80 percent of area residents can't identify stroke symptoms, Carrow said.

If the program is successful in Buffalo, AstraZeneca would like to roll it out in other areas of the country, said Kellie Caldwell, company spokesman.

"A stroke is a treatable emergency," she said. "If we raise awareness, the warning signs could potentially be as familiar as those for heart attacks."