Striking back at stroke

National Stroke Awareness Month is recognized each May. But every day, all year long, strokes and their aftermath are a reality for many Americans.

Challenge yourself today to get educated about the risks and costs of stroke. When you do, you’ll gain the peace of mind that comes from securing your personal health and financial future.

INTRODUCTION
Stroke claims about 137,000 lives each year in the U.S. Among the 795,000 Americans who will have a stroke this year, many will face a long-term disability that could harm their physical well-being, quality of life and capacity to earn a living.

Today, stroke is the country’s third leading cause of death, trailing only heart disease and cancer. On average, every four minutes someone dies of a stroke. Stroke is also a top instigator of disability in adults. Among the estimated 6.4 million stroke survivors in the U.S., many live with serious long-term health issues.

SIGNS OF STROKE
Given the seriousness of stroke, everyone should know and recognize the warning signs. Stroke comes on suddenly yet quietly. A person may experience numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg—usually on one side of the body. He or she may appear confused and have trouble speaking, understanding or seeing in one or both eyes. Balancing and walking become difficult. A severe headache may be present.

Often, stroke gets lumped in with heart attack and heart disease, to the point that people can’t distinguish the warning signs of each. But stroke has its own set of symptoms and can happen to anyone at any age. When the red flags of stroke appear, immediate action is always required.

SPOTLIGHT ON STROKE
This year, close to 800,000 Americans will suffer a stroke. Within the first five years after a stroke, the risk for another stroke increases by more than 40%.

The upside is that as many as 80% of all strokes can be prevented simply through increased awareness of the risk factors and by encouraging at-risk individuals to change harmful behaviors and seek preventive care.

The top contributors to stroke are:

• High blood pressure
• High cholesterol
• Obesity
• Smoking
• Alcohol use
• Abnormal heart rhythm

These risk factors are entirely manageable, but others are not. Advancing age, a family history of stroke, previous stroke or experience with transient ischemic attack (TIA, also called a “mini-stroke”) are other key contributors. In addition, African-Americans, Hispanics,
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