



News Release

Cindy Hamilton
Director, Public Relations
904.202.4907
Cindy.Hamilton@bmcjax.com

1325 San Marco Boulevard
Suite 601
Jacksonville, Florida 32207
e-baptisthealth.com

Vikki Mioduszewski
Medical Writer
904.202.5122
Vikki.Mioduszewski@bmcjax.com

Sleep Specialists Find Association Between Sleep Apnea and Stroke

Jacksonville, Florida, April 26, 2006 – A long-term study in Spain has an association between sleep apnea and the incidence of stroke and cardiovascular events. Over a 10-year period, 500 patients with severe sleep apnea were followed; some were being treated with continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP), while others refused intervention.

“What the study found is that there were fewer strokes and cardiac events in people who had received CPAP,” says sleep specialist Andrew Namen, MD, medical director of Baptist Sleep Disorders Centers.

Patients who refused CPAP treatment for their sleep apnea had 2.34 cardiac events (including stroke) per 100, compared to .64 per 100 patients who used CPAP.

Namen said the reason there is a higher incidence of stroke in patients with untreated sleep apnea is related to the airway closure that occurs during apnea incidents. “It causes an escalation in blood pressure during the course of the patient’s sleep that the patient doesn’t recognize and an elevation of his fight-or-flight mechanism. There’s an increase in metanephrine and epinephrine levels, which results in elevated blood pressure and pulse, and can result in reduced cerebral blood flow. There is a vascular inflammatory change that occurs concomitantly and worsens these ischemic changes. It gets worse and worse as the years go on and people can develop ischemic changes that are suggestive of stroke.

“It has always been theorized that stroke and sleep apnea were related, but not until recently did physicians correlate it with a study where a large number of people were observed over a long period of time,” he says. “We hope that by treating people with sleep apnea, we will have fewer incidences of stroke.”

Namen says he is excited that the study clearly demonstrates what he and other sleep disorders experts have suspected. “It shows that CPAP works,” he says. “This should help physicians to encourage patients to be more compliant with CPAP treatment because they can give better evidence to support that behavior.”

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