Ischemic stroke rates decrease during COVID-19 pandemic

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A new research letter reveals fewer people have been admitted to stroke centers in Michigan and northwest Ohio since the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic, and significantly fewer patients received a mechanical thrombectomy for their ischemic stroke.

The authors call COVID-19's influence on other critical illnesses like stroke a bystander effect. That's because time is of the essence for patients with stroke, but not everyone is getting to a comprehensive stroke center for needed care right now.

In the letter, researchers from Michigan Medicine with colleagues across the Michigan Stroke Treatment Improvement Collaborative reported a significant reduction in ischemic stroke admissions in March when compared both to February of this year (17.8%) and to March of 2019 . Similarly, rates of a procedure for ischemic stroke, mechanical thrombectomy, significantly declined this March compared to February and compared to March of 2019.

"A combination of patient fears, stringent patient transfer criteria, and health system strains may have contributed to lower ischemic stroke admissions as well as the near disappearance of thrombectomy procedures," the authors write.

The differences were most pointed in ischemic stroke and quantity of thrombectomy procedures, authors say, while there was less of a change compared to past months for hemorrhagic stroke.

More information: Aditya S Pandey et al, Letter: COVID-19 Pandemic—The Bystander Effect on Stroke Care in Michigan, *Neurosurgery* (2020). DOI: 10.1093/neuros/nyaa252

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