

# Stroke Experts Cite Stress on Mrs. Nixon

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Although Pat Nixon had no medical history of high blood pressure, the leading cause of stroke, experts said yesterday that, given her age and the recent stressful events in her life, she could easily have developed high blood pressure in the 18 months or so since, according to her doctors, she last underwent a medical examination.

When she was hospitalized Thursday, Mrs. Nixon's blood pressure was moderately to markedly elevated, 175 over 100 or 110, her doctors said, as against a normal level of 160 over 95 for someone her age. But it was not known whether the raised pressure preceded the stroke she suffered Wednesday or was a result of it.

A stroke occurs when the blood supply to a part of the brain is cut off, depriving the nerve cells in that part of essential oxygen. Since brain nerve cells control body movements and sensation, their impairment may lead to paralysis and unresponsiveness, with a stroke on one side of the brain affecting the opposite side of the body.

About three-fourths of strokes are caused by a clot forming or lodging in a brain artery and shutting off part of the brain's blood supply. The rest are hemorrhagic strokes, the type Mrs. Nixon is believed to have suffered, caused either by ruptured artery in the brain or seepage of blood through a brain vessel.

In the past, hemorrhagic strokes were thought to be far less common and more severe

than clot-caused strokes. However, brain scans with a new X-ray technique called a computerized tomography have shown that many people have mild hemorrhagic strokes from which they recover completely, according to Dr. Fred Plum, chief of neurology at New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center.

In general, about 35 percent of victims die within the early days of suffering a stroke, with most deaths occurring among elderly and debilitated persons who suffered severe strokes. Of those who survive, Dr. Plum estimated, 70 to 75 percent recover almost completely in time and with proper rehabilitation.

## Blood Is Reabsorbed

Although clot-caused strokes sometimes occur in a series, hemorrhagic strokes usually do not recur in the same site. The spilled blood is reabsorbed from the brain tissues over a period of weeks or months, during which symptoms of the stroke usually persist. The patient's condition then usually improves.

High blood pressure is the single most common cause of stroke, and particularly hemorrhagic stroke, according to Dr. John Laragh, an expert on hypertension (high blood pressure) who directs the Cardiovascular Center at New York Hospital.

"Mrs. Nixon could easily have become hypertensive in

the last 18 months," Dr. Laragh said in an interview. "It happens all the time—especially in stress situations and in this age group." Mrs. Nixon is 64, and the risk of stroke increases greatly after age 60.

Dr. Laragh's surmise was echoed by several other experts in the field.

## Treatment Is Effective

Dr. Plum pointed out that treatment of even moderate hypertension greatly decreases the risk of strokes of all types and particularly of hemorrhagic stroke.

In recent years, the incidence of stroke, which strikes several hundred thousand Americans each year, has been dropping, largely because more people with high blood pressure are being effectively treated. Strokes occur about 10 percent more frequently in women than in men.

Yesterday, the National Center for Health Statistics reported that last year stroke caused 10.2 percent of all deaths. The death rate dropped 6.3 percent, from 98.1 deaths per 100,000 in the population in 1974 to 91.8 in 1975. However, stroke remains the third leading cause of death, after heart disease and cancer.

Other conditions that predispose people to developing strokes are diabetes, high serum cholesterol levels and heavy cigarette smoking.