

January 22, 2015 | By Jackie Carr

## Region's First Camp for Stroke Survivors and Caregivers at UC San Diego

**Therapeutic retreat offers support, education and a bit of fun**

On Jan. 23-25, more than 15 stroke survivors and their caregivers will go on a mini-vacation in La Jolla, CA, as part of a therapeutic retreat for those whose lives have been affected – sometimes turned upside down – by stroke. The 50s-themed stroke camp is being co-hosted by UC San Diego Health System, which has one of the nation's first certified Comprehensive Stroke Centers.



*Alexander Khalessi, MD, neurosurgeon, UC San Diego Health System*

“Stroke camp is part of UC San Diego’s larger commitment to the care of neurovascular patients and their families,” said Alexander Khalessi, MD, director of endovascular neurosurgery and surgical director of neurocritical care at UC San Diego Health System. “Beyond receiving the best possible neurological care or developing new therapies, we support patients through their recovery and get them back to their lives.”

The camp will be the first Refresh & Retreat Stroke Camp in California, with the flare of an American Bandstand theme, complete with an invitation to bring “your letter sweaters, poodle skirts and dancing shoes.” The event is sponsored with Covidien, a global health care leader.

Stroke care has advanced rapidly in recent years, but strokes still involve some permanent loss of healthy brain tissue due to either a lack of blood flow or bleeding within the brain itself. As a result, many stroke survivors require significant time to recover and rehabilitate. During this healing process, it is the caregivers – often a spouse or family member – who may suddenly find themselves overwhelmed and socially isolated by their new responsibilities.

“Stroke camp is about pampering the caregivers and recognizing the toll strokes take on them,” said Julie Jurf, RN, stroke care coordinator, UC San Diego Health System. “The camp’s aim is to bring fun, respite and renewal to stroke survivors, their families and caregivers.”

Jurf will volunteer at the retreat to assist caregivers.

“I will be pushing a wheelchair, standing in line for food, or doing whatever needs to be done so that my caregiver can go for a swim or relax,” she said. “Even just a two-day break can go a long way to bring renewal to people’s life.”

Khalessi added that stroke camp provides patients with support and encouragement, offers a welcome rest for their caregivers, and provides an opportunity to bond with other stroke survivors.

Over three days, attendees will be invited to participate in a variety of camp-like activities, including drum circles, craft-time and 50’s bingo, as well as survivor and caregiver break-out discussion sessions that allow attendees to vent, share and console as needed.

In addition, Khalessi, a national expert in catheter-based and open cranial neurosurgeries for stroke, aneurysms and other blood vessel disorders of the brain, will lead a tour of the Center for the Future of Surgery at the UC San Diego School of Medicine. This facility is a national destination for developing and refining new life-saving stroke treatments, now transforming the standard of care for stroke patients.

“Stroke is a disease that had no solutions 30 years ago. It is now a treatable medical and neurosurgical emergency. Even five years ago, stroke care involved a single drug and supporting patients through their new disabilities,” Khalessi said. “We now have catheter-based procedures and devices that allow for rapid and safe restoration of blood flow in the most severe forms of stroke, involving large vessels of the brain,” a procedure known as stent thrombectomy that in a recent study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* greatly improved stroke patients’ prognoses.

“We have phenomenal new treatments for hemorrhagic stroke, or bleeds within the brain, due to cerebral aneurysms or high blood pressure, using minimally invasive surgical or catheter-based techniques,” he said. “These strokes are no less devastating and were a death sentence a decade ago.”

The designation of a Comprehensive Stroke Center at UC San Diego Health System is formal recognition of its ability to receive and treat the most complex stroke cases around the clock, every day of the year, with a multidisciplinary team of neurologists, neurosurgeons, cardiologists and rehabilitation specialists.

Approximately 680,000 American's each year survive a stroke, making stroke the nation's leading cause of disability. A patient's ability to benefit from the latest in stroke-care technologies hinges upon a third party recognizing stroke and ensuring that the patient is brought to a hospital where comprehensive stroke care can be provided.

### **About Retreat & Refresh Stroke Camp**

Retreat & Refresh Stroke Camp is a non-profit based in Peoria, Illinois. It has sponsored 105 stroke camps nationwide since 2004. The non-profits' founder and executive director, Marylee Nunley, is caregiver to her husband John, who had a stroke in 2001. For more information, visit <http://strokecamp.org/>

---

### **MEDIA CONTACT**

**Jackie Carr**, 858-249-0456, [jcarr@ucsd.edu](mailto:jcarr@ucsd.edu)

UC San Diego's [Studio Ten 300](#) offers radio and television connections for media interviews with our faculty, which can be coordinated via [studio@ucsd.edu](mailto:studio@ucsd.edu). To connect with a UC San Diego faculty expert on relevant issues and trending news stories, visit <https://ucsdnews.ucsd.edu/media-resources/faculty-experts>.