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National

Stroke rate decline in NZ three to four times slower than OECD

Thu, 23 Apr 2009 1:52p.m.



Debbie Patel was one of 6,000 Kiwis last year to have a stroke

Watch Video

Most strokes are a blockage in the blood supply to the brain causing tissue damage and in severe cases, death.

In 2001 Debbie Patel became one of the 6,000 Kiwis a year to have a stroke and became confined to a

wheelchair.

Professor Valery Feigin who is head of AUT University's new stroke research centre studied the number of strokes worldwide.

He found in developed wealthy nations it has declined by 42 percent in the past 30 years, but had double in poorer developing countries during the same time period.

"New Zealand doesn't look very good," says Professor Feigin. "The New Zealand rate of decline is three to four times slower than in other comparable developed countries."

He says he was shocked by what he found in New Zealand, while strokes in the general population had gone down 11 percent, studies have shown Maori and Pacific islanders have the same sort of outcomes as those in third world countries

An increase of 16 percent in Maori and a staggering 66 percent amongst Pacific Islanders.

"The time to think whether to do anything about stroke in New Zealand has passed," says Professor Feigin. "We must act."

Those over 65 have the highest risk of having a stroke – but can prevent it by keeping their blood pressure down. As well as this, quitting smoking, eating a healthy diet, and staying active will all help.

For Debbie Patel, exercise is the key to her recovery.

"It's like a car I guess," she says. "If you don't oil it and grease it it will seize up or the batteries will run out. I think we're the same."

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