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STROKE SURVIVOR SUPPORT GROUP (SSSG)

By: Lorena Sun, BSN, RN, CCRN

The UC San Diego Health Systems (UCSDHS) is a nationally renowned healthcare organization that continues receiving accolades for exemplary achievements. UCSD is the only academic medical center in the region, UCSDHS is the prime destination for patients seeking highly specialized care. Among many of the specialties offered at the UCSDHS, our medical center in Hillcrest became the first regional Comprehensive Stroke Center in 2013. Although our medical center was providing the highest level of care for complex strokes regionally, there was one vital aspect missing in the continuum of care. After conducting a community needs assessment, we wanted to ensure that our stroke survivor patients in addition to those in the community continued to receive support upon

discharge. A partnership was collaborated with doctors and nurses in the interest of creating a peer support forum for stroke survivors and family/caregivers. Support groups have been proven to help ease isolation, provide education and encouragement; and challenge people to go beyond their limitations (2014, American Stroke Association, p.2-3). Our Stroke Survivor Support Group (SSSG) meets monthly and is free and open to the community. We invite survivors of stroke and brain injury, their family members, and caregivers to join us for an uplifting monthly gathering.

Our journey has been colorful with a few bumps on the road along the way. With much anticipation our SSSG was launched in March 2014. Collaboratively and respectfully, all involved were excited that this day had finally come. Two attendees

came to our first SSSG, we were all so ecstatic that we had a welcoming party of white coats and extreme enthusiasm. Looking back, I believe we may have overwhelmed our guests, seeing as those two attendees never returned. Needless to say,



Lorena Sun, BSN, RN, CCRN is a Clinical Nurse III on the Critical Care Unit at UCSD Health Systems in Hillcrest. The hospital became a Comprehensive Stroke Center in 2012, this was the inspiration for her Evidence Based Practice project, "The Implementation of a Stroke Survivor Support Group at UC San Diego's Comprehensive Stroke Center." She is both a co-creator and co-facilitator of this group. She received her BSN from Point Loma Nazarene University in 2011.

Top Left to Right: Kim Johnson MSW, Lorena Sun BSN, RN, CCRN, Royya Modir MD and Stroke Support Group Members get together for "Stroke 101" education with Royya Modir MD.



November National Caregiver Month
Caregiver Gift Bag includes caregiver poem, inspirational stone, chocolate, stress relief tea, antioxidant mix, and lavender aromatherapy sprigs. Bags were handed out to all members to give to their caregivers.

a hard lesson was learned. Month after month SSSG went without anyone attending, a dry spell for four months straight. This was discouraging, however this outcome is anticipated in new support groups (2014, American Stroke Association, p.22-24). Due to attendance being our biggest challenge, attendance is documented monthly and we use an attendance graph to measure the outcome of our success.

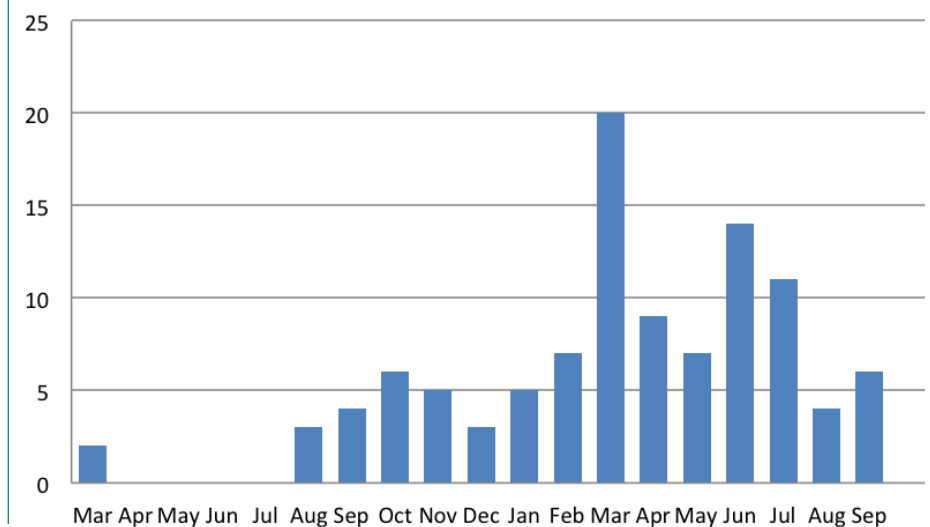
Marketing SSSG became a top priority and our group began to grow slowly. Fast forwarding to our one year anniversary, we wanted to do something fun and different. A music therapist whom specialized in stroke music therapy was contacted. She was willing to volunteer her services and musical instruments for one session. This was great news, and advertising this special day began. A flyer was made and emails were sent out, invitations were sent out to local neighboring stroke support groups. Personal phone calls were made to over twenty different stroke survivors and family members, we even managed to

arrange transportation for those who wanted to attend, but had no way of getting to our SSSG. This was going to be the most special event we had hosted thus far.

Unfortunately, the day of our event everything seemed to be falling apart. The SSSG typically has refreshments and a fruit platter delivered every session, but unknown to the planners,

refreshments did not make it to this session. Next, a phone call came from the music therapist thirty minutes before the session was to begin; she had been in a car accident, she was unharmed, but would not be able to make it to SSSG. There was nothing else planned for our one year anniversary event and panic began to resonate within. Fortunately, we were able to purchase as many bottled waters and muffins from our cafeteria that could be physically carried over to our building. Extra cups, plates, and knives, were brought and the refreshments were shared among the group. As people began to walk through the doors, they seemed to be very understanding of the situation. Even though the day started not as planned, the group seemed to lead itself effortlessly. People shared their stories, their journey, milestones, and frustrations. Together we laughed, we cried, and we connected. For many, it is about being able to socialize in an environment where they feel safe and accepted. The turnout was amazing and our highest attendance record to date, with more than twenty attendees. This was the

ATTENDEES





Holiday wreath making
Wreaths were passed out to hospitalized stroke survivors over the holidays with an inspirational message of hope.

outcome of success.

The SSSG topics change monthly, topics are handpicked by our members. We offer education and open discussion; we have covered stroke education, pain management, speech therapy, physical therapy, and nutrition. We also have held group sessions that are just for fun and socializing. Over the holidays, during our group session, we sat around a table listening to holiday music, socializing, and crafting wreaths of sage, lavender, rosemary, and twine. These wreaths were passed out in the hospital to stroke survivors

that were hospitalized over the holiday season, with a simple message “Made with love, by the hands of Stroke Survivors.” We also recently had a SSSG Summer Luau, members wore aloha print and were given Hawaiian leis. We ate, socialized, played games, took photos, hula danced in our chairs, and laughed. Our SSSG has also gained notoriety in the community and has made ties with other local stroke survivor support groups. Our SSSG was invited to Alvarado’s “Comebackers Club” picnic and free concert in the park. Several of our members joined the fun and made



Summer Luau and best Aloha print outfit contest for Stroke Support Group members.

new connections and friends with other stroke survivors.

Being able to reach out to the community has had a tremendous impact on people’s lives. One member that comes to mind is widowed, without children and family. He was forced into retirement after his stroke left him with a speech and physical deficit. He has expressed extreme loneliness due to isolation and the loss of friendships after his stroke. The SSSG has become his family. Come rain or shine, since his first meeting with us, this member has not missed a session. We have watched his spirits lift and friendships blossom with other group members. Because many stroke survivors are at high risk for depression, I believe this group offers a guiding light for those in a dark place.

Since our one year anniversary we have been able to retain members. Attendance varies from month to month, but averages between approximately six and twelve members. Monthly reminder emails are sent out. We personally reach out to those who have been absent for more than 2-3 group sessions, passing on the message of hope and reminding them that their presence is missed and their SSSG family cares for them. Directly aligned with the UCSDHS mission, the SSSG is dedicated to deliver a continuum of care through commitment to the community. We look forward to growing, servicing the community, and helping to inspire people’s lives.

REFERENCES:

Successful Stroke Support Groups: Our guide to organizing successful stroke support groups. (January 2014). *American Stroke Association*, p. 1-28

PIE IN THE SKY

By: Chad Hutchinson, MSN, RN, ONC

The mission of Mama’s Kitchen is: “At Mama’s Kitchen we believe that everyone is entitled to the basic necessity of life — nutritious food”. As a community-driven organization, they provide nutrition support to men, women, and children affected by AIDS or cancer, this is a population that is very vulnerable to nutritional deficits. Founded in 1990, Mama’s Kitchen has provided in excess of 7 million meals to their clients. These meals provide 100% of their nutritional needs, and also provides their bodies with necessary nutrients to allow medications to work effectively. This service is available at no charge to the client.

During my time as an RN at UCSD I have seen the organization’s commitment to community outreach. I also had occasion to care for patients at UCSD who were recipients of Mama’s Kitchen’s services. They spoke highly of Mama’s Kitchen and the importance of the meals that were delivered to them in times of great need. Based on this strong recommendation I looked into how I could lend a hand.

Each year their biggest fundraiser is “Mama’s Pie in the Sky”. This creative event gathers thousands of pies baked by local hotels, casinos, restaurants and bakeries, and sells them through pie-selling teams and individuals. The pies are picked up the day before Thanksgiving at Wells Fargo or the Unitarian Universalist Church across the street from UCSD in Hillcrest. Each pie

sold provides 7 hot meals delivered to those in San Diego in need.

I supported this event for several years as a pie-buyer, and then used our shared-governance model to get our unit more involved by starting a UCSD 8th Floor pie-selling team. We have supported this great organization for three years. We now have dedicated buyers who look forward to supporting this special organization every year. We make announcements through email, promote at the BONES Symposium, and set up at tables in the cafeteria. Some of our past pie sellers include Leah Yoshisaki-Yusi BSN, RN, ONC, Melanie Nelson BSN, RN, ONC, Heather Gugin BSN, RN, ONC, Dennis Gerrits BSN, RN, ONC, and Michelle Perry BSN, RN, ONC. Last year Mama’s Kitchen raised \$111,599 at this event. That equals over 31,000 hot meals! In addition to supporting this event, our unit also hosts a food drive to fill their food pantry. Rommel Fong BSN, RN, ONC works with Mama’s Kitchen to deliver a barrel that we keep in our break room between Thanksgiving and Christmas, and we fill it up! It’s wonderful to have the opportunity to support an organization that is local, provides grass-roots help to those in need, and end up with a pie, too! This isn’t just “Pie in the Sky” philosophy, it is the community in action filling a need and we here at UCSD are proud to be standing on the front lines to help address that need.

Anyone who would like to

participate in the 2016 team is invited to contact me. The 2015 #1 pie selling team sold 225 pies. I believe UCSD can exceed that next year!



Chad Hutchison MSN, RN, ONC has been a proud nurse at UCSD since 2005. He has been the Nurse Manager of the 8th Floor Orthopedics/Surgery unit for 6 years.”