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Stroke Glossary: 20 Essential Medical Terms in Cerebrovascular Care

Understanding stroke terminology is vital for accurate diagnosis, treatment planning, and patient education. Whether you're a healthcare provider, medical student, or caregiver, mastering these core medical terms helps clarify the complex nature of cerebrovascular accidents (CVAs). Below is a glossary of 20 essential terms frequently used in stroke medicine.

1. Ischemic Stroke

A stroke caused by a blockage in a cerebral artery, typically due to a thrombus or embolus, resulting in reduced blood flow and oxygen to brain tissue.

2. Hemorrhagic Stroke

A type of stroke caused by the rupture of a cerebral blood vessel, leading to bleeding in or around the brain.

3. Thrombus

A stationary blood clot formed within a vessel that may restrict or obstruct blood flow to the brain.

4. Embolus

A clot or foreign substance that travels through the bloodstream and lodges in a cerebral artery, causing an acute blockage.

5. Infarct

An area of tissue death in the brain due to prolonged lack of oxygenated blood, commonly associated with ischemic stroke.

6. Transient Ischemic Attack (TIA)

A brief episode of neurological dysfunction caused by temporary reduction in cerebral blood flow, often called a "mini stroke."

7. Aphasia

Loss or impairment of the ability to speak, understand, read, or write due to damage in the brain's language centers.

8. Dysphasia

Partial disruption of language abilities, leading to difficulty in expressing or comprehending speech.

9. Hemiparesis

Muscle weakness affecting one side of the body, commonly caused by a stroke affecting the opposite hemisphere of the brain.

10. Hemiplegia

Complete paralysis on one side of the body resulting from significant damage to motor pathways.

11. Dysarthria

Impaired articulation of speech due to weakness or poor coordination of the muscles involved in speaking.

12. Ataxia

A neurological sign indicating impaired balance or coordination, often resulting from cerebellar stroke.

13. Nystagmus

Involuntary, rhythmic eye movements, which may indicate damage to the cerebellum or brainstem.

14. Dysphagia

Difficulty swallowing, a common post-stroke complication that can lead to aspiration or nutritional deficits.

15. Contralateral

Refers to the opposite side of the body from where a stroke or brain lesion is located.

16. Homonymous Hemianopsia

Visual field loss affecting the same side in both eyes, typically due to lesions in the optic pathway.

17. Aneurysm

A balloon-like dilation of a weakened arterial wall, which may rupture and cause a subarachnoid hemorrhage.

18. Arteriovenous Malformation (AVM)

A congenital vascular anomaly where arteries and veins connect abnormally, increasing the risk of hemorrhagic stroke.

19. Intracerebral Hemorrhage

Bleeding within the brain tissue itself, often due to uncontrolled hypertension or trauma.

20. Subarachnoid Hemorrhage

Bleeding into the space between the brain and the meninges, commonly caused by a ruptured aneurysm.

Why This Matters

In stroke care, accurate terminology saves time—and time saves brain. Recognizing the difference between aphasia and dysarthria, or between ischemic and hemorrhagic stroke, helps guide fast and effective interventions. Use this glossary as a trusted reference to communicate clearly and confidently in clinical, educational, or caregiving settings.

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