Stroke Topics: Unilateral Spatial Neglect (“Neglect”)

What is Neglect?

- Patients with neglect (also known as inattention) behave as if the neglected space does not exist. They may not “see”, “hear” or respond to information on that side.
- Neglect always occurs on the opposite side of the body/space that the stroke occurred on. Neglect is more common when the left side of the body is affected.
- Many patients with neglect do not realize that they have neglect.
- Patients may present with varying degrees of neglect however all forms warrant your attention as neglect can have a devastating effect on rehabilitation outcomes.

5 Ways You Can Help

1. **Encourage looking to the neglected side**
   Patients with neglect typically have an unorganized and inefficient visual search pattern and require practice and “cueing” to look to the neglected side.

2. **Provide visual reminders or cues (called “anchors”) to assist the individual to scan all items in front of him during meals, reading, etc**
   Anchors (like the green strip of paper in the picture to the left) provide visual reminders for the person to independently learn to search to the neglected side.

3. **Ensure safety of limbs**
   Neglected arms and legs have to be protected to ensure they don’t just “hang” or get tangled in wheelchairs, bed covers, or get bumped in hallways.

4. **Provide sensory input to increase awareness of neglected side**
   Providing deep pressure touching or “tapping” or visual/verbal cues encourages the person to be aware of neglected side.

5. **Engage patient in the environment**
   Patients with neglect demonstrate an inability or a lack of interest to participate in activities. Family members state that the patients do not seem like them self. Take the time to engage the patient in conversation or ask them simple questions. If possible and appropriate, try to have these conversations on the affected side.

Speak to an Occupational Therapist or go to www.neostrokenetwork.com to find out more about neglect.