http://www.latimes.com/health/boostershots/la-heb-stroke-20101209,0,2544531.story

Stroke slips from third-leading cause of death to fourth; U.S. life expectancy declines

By Thomas H. Maugh II, Los Angeles Times

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After five decades as the third-leading cause of death in the United States, stroke slipped to fourth place in 2008, edged out by chronic lower respiratory disease, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Thursday. Preliminary figures for 2008 also showed that life expectancy slipped slightly in 2008, declining from 77.9 years in 2007 to 77.8 in 2008.

Heart disease and cancer remained the two leading causes of death, accounting for 48% of all deaths. In fifth through 10th places were accidents, Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, influenza/pneumonia, kidney diseases, and septicemia. Overall, there were 2,473,018 deaths in the United States that year, 49,306 more than in the preceding year.

Better treatments have been leading to a slow decline in deaths from strokes, which fell by 3.8% from 2007 to a total of 133,750 in 2008. Meanwhile, deaths from chronic lower respiratory disease have been climbing, including a 7.8% jump to 141,075 deaths in 2008. But the agency cautioned that some of that increase may be due to changes in how the World Health Organization has coded and classified such deaths, so that some deaths due to pneumonia were added into the category. The CDC will investigate the figures more thoroughly in coming months, researchers said.

Although life expectancy dropped a little more than a month overall, black men had a record-high life expectancy of 70.2 years, up from 70 years in 2007. The life-expectancy gap between blacks and whites was 4.6 years, a decrease of 0.2 years from the preceding year.

The data is based on 99% of death certificates reported to the National Center for Health Statistics from all 50 states, the District of Columbia and U.S. territories.

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