JANUARY 2025 ISSUE:1-2025 in Bulgaria



NEW APPROACH-NEW HOPE

UPDATED BULGARIAN STROKE STATISTICS FOR 2024

NEW APPROACH - NEW HOPE

INSPIRATIONS FROM THE FIELD

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When we founded the Association for Stroke and Aphasia in 2020, my personal cause after my mother's stroke became a national cause that turned out to concern the destiny of 50,000 Bulgarians who suffer stroke every year. I promised myself that I would try to save other people the difficulties and stress that my family is going through.

After successfully creating a family business, which I still run for the last 30 years, I did not expect that one day circumstances would make me become a caregiver of my mother and face the challenge to balance my time between caring for a stroke patient, my own family, business... and maybe try to find time for myself...The stroke of a loved one in our family turned us upside down and put our whole life at stake.

New tasks related to the mission and cause of the Association for Stroke and Aphasia appeared in my schedule. Thanks to our efforts, Bulgaria signed a Declaration by which it accepted the European Stroke Plan. We were among the first countries in Europe!

We received huge support from the Mayor of Sofia Municipality, with whom we signed a memorandum of joint activity. This example was followed by all municipalities. The media began to write actively about stroke in search of the right answers to open questions. The voice of the stroke patients acquired its new, expert image, recognized by the medical societies and institutions in the country. We continued being innovative in all we do. In 2024. we have created a stroke guide accessible to everyone - "Stroke Infobot" in Viber. We started delivery of adequate social services for people after stroke and we established the National Support Line 070011404. We also conducted a first-of-its-kind survey of the unmet needs of stroke survivors with aphasia. These are just some of our achievements for the first 4 years.

As a young organization, everything we do is the result of joint efforts, a lot of faith, strong spirit, creativity, understanding, innovation and the invaluable support of our volunteers! Each of our small victories is equal to those first confident steps of a person walking again after a stroke and the first words he utters. These are the small achievements of a person returning back to his life.

Because we do believe that stroke can be prevented, treated and defeated.

Founder

Chairperson of the Board

ASSOCIATION FOR STROKE AND APHASIA



Dear Readers,

It is with great pleasure and pride that we present to you the results of our national campaign "Be prepared! Recognize the stroke. Act fast!", held on the occasion of World Stroke Day on October 29, 2024. This year was extremely important for us, as we changed the focus of our campaign, namely: mass dissemination of key knowledge about stroke, including the nature of stroke, risk factors and symptoms, as well as the proper behavior when stroke happens.

We already know that the lack of knowledge about stroke among the population leads to delays in notifying emergency teams and losing the opportunity for acute stroke treatment on time. That is why we have directed all our efforts in this direction. We believe that raising the stroke awareness of the population is the key to achieving tangible change.

Our campaign included various initiatives and materials, such as the installation "Path of Knowledge", videos, banners, flyers, other information and materials. Our efforts were supported by numerous organizations, including municipalities, NGOs, universities, hospitals, and the media.

We thank everyone who joined and supported our cause. We are confident that our joint efforts will lead to visible strategic results and will help reduce the number of stroke cases and stroke related disability in Bulgaria.

Jeorgi Jeorgier

VICE PRESIDENT
ASSOCIATION FOR STROKE AND APHASIA



29-th OCTOBER-WORLD STROKE DAY

World Stroke Day is observed on October 29 to underscore the serious nature and high rates of stroke, raise awareness of the prevention and treatment of the condition, and ensure better care and support for survivors.

On this day, organizations around the world have facilitated events emphasizing education, testing, and initiatives to improve the damaging effects of stroke worldwide.

In 2023, the motto of the World Stroke Organization for the World Stroke Day campaign was "Together we are stronger than stroke". In 2024 the campaign was held under the slogan "Be stronger than the stroke".

Bulgaria joined the initiative of WSO, but large-scale campaigns have been held since 2020.

In 2020 The Association for Stroke and Aphasia ran its first national campaign for World Stroke Day in Bulgaria.

In 2022 ASA received an award from the WSO for the best campaign in middle-income countries.

Be #GreaterThan > Stroke

W RLD STR KE DAY 29TH OCT

World Stroke Day is a day to reflect and analyze. This is a special day when we look back at the past year and hope less people we know, love and respect have suffered a stroke. In 2024, we as bulgarians, cannot look back into 2024 with calmness. The reason is 2024 was yet another year of increased number of stroke cases. It was a time of a shocking growth of strokes among young people, while at the same time the direct impact of stroke on each of us became significant. We are the people at average age of 45 years, all the elderly people from an aging nation... in other words - all Bulgarians who suffer a stroke due to lack of decisive measures to cope with such socially significant problem like stroke.

NEW APPROACH

The contstant negative trend in the country in recent years motivated us to change the focus of our campaign in 2024, concentrating on the launch of a permanent mass dissemination of key knowledge about stroke, namely:

· Nature of stroke;

· Risk factors;

Symptoms of stroke and proper behavior when

stroke happens.

Why do we focus on the mass dissemination of this information? The reason is that this is the only area in which we, the Association for Stroke and Aphasia (ASA), as a patient organization, can directly and measurably influence to improve the pessimistic trend. Our country lags far behind the level of access to modern treatment worldwide. However, in big cities, where the largest percentage of the population is concentrated, there is access to such treatment. This does not mean that there are no gaps in the system. To illustrate the current situation, we will look at the access of patients to thrombolytic treatment or the so-called thrombolysis. The method provides an opportunity to reduce significantly the disability after stroke, being applicable to an average of 35% of cases of ischemic stroke (stroke caused by a blockage of a blood vessel in the brain). This treatment has been known for more than 15 years, and it's use is constantly growing worldwide. In order to be successful, it is necessary to transport the stroke patient to a neurological department, which applies the method within the therapeutic window of 4.5 hours.

Note: For the purposes of the relevance of the analysis that follows, we provide data for 2024, taking into account minimal progress in the fight against stroke and a new increase in cases compared to 2023, data from which served as a basis for the development of the strategy for the ASA for World Stroke Day campaign last year.



In 2024 in Bulgaria 133 neurological departments declared treatment of stroke in its acute phase, but only 62 of them applied thrombolysis. This means that less than 1/2 of neurological departments provide access to this treatment. To make the scale we are talking about more understandable, we will analyze the potential for modern stroke treatment in the country. In 2024 according to NHIF data, 45360 ischemic strokes have been registered in the country. For about 35% of them (or 15,876 people), the application of thrombolysis is indicated. However, thrombolysis performed last year were only 1911 or only 4.2%. This means that 14,000 Bulgarians were deprived of the opportunity to be protected from disability due to stroke. In order to be objective in our analysis, it is reasonable to take into account the achievements of the leading neurological departments in the country. This gives us an orientation for the realistically achievable values at the moment. neurological departments reported highest results in the application of thrombolysis for the country - an average of 22% of treatments performed. Based on this, we can summarize that currently 9,979 Bulgarians should be able to rely on modern treatment of stroke through thrombolysis, but instead, only about 20% of them received such treatment (1911). Apparently one certainly proven way to change the alarming statistics in Bulgaria is to improve access to modern treatment. This leads to reduced disability of the population (respectively smaller burden on the social budget of the country). We are talking about approximately 8000 cases per year or 18% of ischemic cases per year.

Another key performance indicator, which measures the adequacy of the behavior of medical teams in applying IVT treatment for acute stroke is the so-called "door-to-needle" metrics. It measures time from the patient's admission to the actual application of treatment. The leading neurological stroke centers in Bulgaria demonstrate high standard, comparable with the European achievements. The reaction of the medical teams is within 30 minutes of the patient's admission.

In 2024, the Association for Stroke and Aphasia launched an initiative: a series of conferences under the motto "Stroke – A Look into the Black Box", with the participation of the responsible

Stroke in Bulgaria in 2024



institutions[1], committed specialists in the field and representatives of media. They traced the entire path of the stroke patient from primary prevention to the treatment of its acute phase. All specialists agreed upon the concept that the major problem in Bulgaria is the lack of knowledge about stroke among the population, resulting in a delay in notifying emergency teams(EMS) about the incident and respectively delayed transport of the stroke patient to the proper stroke center/unit within the therapeutic window.

All these factors motivated the Association for Stroke and Aphasia to appeal to every Bulgarian citizen, every organization and institution to cooperate and spread key knowledge and awareness about stroke so that every Bulgarian is properly informed and prepared. We are confident that such actions will lead to strategic results which are visible and measurable.

 $\ensuremath{\mathsf{[1]}}$ Including the newly established Center for Emergency Medical Care by Air.

CAMPAIGN'S GOAL

Improving access to modern stroke treatment in Bulgaria by correctly and timely recognising the stroke symptoms and notifying the EMS[1], based on increasing the stroke awareness of the population.

[1] Emergency Medical Center – Emergency Medical Center (EMC). In the text, it is understood as a unifying concept for the institutions responsible for transporting the patient from the scene of the accident to a clinic for conducting modern treatment.



KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS



- 1. Percentage of ischemic stroke patients indicated for IVT treatment who received trombolysis within the therapeutic window.
- 2. Percentage of patients indicated for thrombolysis on an annual basis, corresponding to the average percentage of conducted trombolysis in the leading Bulgarian stroke units/departments/centres for the respective year.

DISSEMINATION OF KEY KNOWLEDGE ABOUT STROKE

We decided to present the key knowledge about stroke in several ways, developing the campaign materials. In the whole process, we tried to find a way to converge the materials and messages from the previous campaigns. This was our main goal, motivated precisely by the new approach of moving from a sporadic to a permanent campaign. The materials we included in the campaign are presented as follows:

INSTALLATION "PATH OF KNOWLEDGE"



In many places around the country, lots of people had the chance to go through our "Path of Knowledge". This is a way to learn quickly, based on interactive experience. In just a few minutes, walking the 7-meter real pathway, you can learn a lot about stroke. For those who want to learn more, the printed interactive pathway offers special QR codes by which you can access advanced information. At the end of the pathway, the person can play a short online game to check whether he has learned the symptoms of stroke correctly and how to act properly in case of stroke. We are sure that with such interactive approach, each person who has passed successfully the "Path of Knowledge" will be prepared to save someone's life in case of stroke. The Association for Stroke and Aphasia has created an opportunity for everyone who passed the "Path of Knowledge" and acquired the key knowledge about stroke, to take a selfie or a photo of himself in the end of the Path on a special spotlight and send his/her photo to our social channels as a support of our cause.

Material: Vinyl + aluminum construction

Set includes: Vinyl path 150*/00cm; L-banner 120*200cm.; transport case; Digital guide for volunteers.

Advantages:

Mobile, easily portable and convenient to transport.

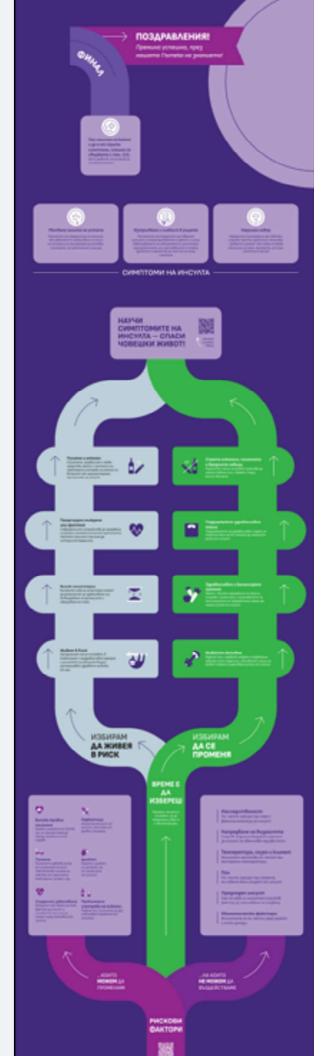
Fast installation, high wear resistance.



Disadvantages:

Mainly for indoor use.

Quiet and warm weather is required when used outdoors.





DIGITAL RESOURCES



VIDEOS

- 1. In 2024. A new video was created in three versions:
- -Full video (2 min.) combining information about statistics in the country, stroke symptoms, instructions for free downloading the stroke manual in Viber Infobot Stroke and announcement of the national help line;
 - -Short video (1 min), including the symptoms of stroke and the National Support Line;
- -Short video (30 sec) including information about the Stroke Infobot in Viber and the National Help Line.
- 2. An advertising video with English subtitles was created to illustrate the work of the Association for Stroke and Aphasia and its important role as a stroke support organization in Bulgaria.

The video was intended exclusively for the charity campaign of the Rotary Club London, held at the Embassy of the Republic of Bulgaria in London on 14.11.2024.

3. Video from WSD2022 and WSD2023 campaigns.





VISUALS

The images and visual resources for the campaign are harmonized with the colors associated with the brand of the Association for Stroke and Aphasia and the common symbols and images illustrating the fight against stroke around the world. We have put an accent towards the community and the importance of the information provided by the campaign for the community. All visual rescources of the campaign were used both for publications on websites social network channels, banners, press releases and publications in the media.



DIGITAL RESOURCES



BANNERS

A number of banners of different sizes and content were created to serve both in the campaign and for subsequent initiatives within the concept of permanent dissemination of key knowledge about stroke.





INFORMATION AND SUPPORT MATERIALS

- A leaflet with the symptoms of stroke, a method for checking them and an algorithm for proper behavior;
- Draft press release designed to support the work on announcing the activities of municipalities within the campaign.





1.REFERENCES

- -Links to information materials available in the cloud with free access;
- -QR codes pointing to specific information materials or libraries of free access to information materials.

PRINTED MATERIALS

FLYERS

- -Symptoms of stroke (Campaign WSD2022);
- -Riskometer (campaign ESD2022);
- Infobot for stroke in Viber (campaign ESD2024).









POSTERS

Symptoms of stroke (Campaign WSD2022).





Научете симптомите на инсулта:





OTHER MATERIALS

Special silicone wristbands were created for the campaign. They were distributed to participants during the activities accompanying the installation "Path of Knowledge".

SUPPORT INSTITUTIONS AND **ORGANISATIONS**



The campaign traditionally involves organizations <u>University hospitals and other hospitals:</u> working with volunteers. In 2024 for the first time, all Bulgarian municipalities massively responded and joined the campaign. Even very small settlements in the province also expressed their willingness to support the campaign and the cause. For the first time the medical society also joined the campaign and. As a result in all leading hospitals in the country we provided the installation" Path of knowledge" where we noted very active support from voluteers - medical students and trainee doctors. Representatives of the media, as well as Bulgarian and Italian businesses, also joined the Non-profit organizations: campaign.

The campaign was supported by: Central Government and Local Government Organisations:

- 265 municipalities in the country (all).

Educational institutions:

- -South-West University "Neofit Rilski"—Blagoevgrad;
- -78 "Hristo Smirnenski" Secondary School Sofia;
- -Senior School "St. ST. Cyril and Methodius" -Bulgarian National Radio; Veliko Tarnovo;

- -UMHAT "St. Anna" Sofia;
- -UMHATEM N.I.PIROGOV Sofia;
- -UMHAT "Sveta Marina" Varna;
- -Heart and Brain Hospital Burgas;
- -Heart and Brain Hospital Pleven;
- -"Dr. Stefan Cherkezov" Hospital Veliko Tarnovo;
- -University Hospital "Prof. Dr. Stoyan Kirkovich" -Stara Zagora;
- -MHAT Silistra;
- -Diagnostic-consultative centre-1 Shumen.

- -Bulgarian Red Cross;
- -Council of Women in Business in Bulgaria

Business Organizations:

- -Confindustria Bulgaria;
- -Shopping Mall "Serdika Center" Sofia;
- -Shopping center Mall "Veliko Tarnovo""

Media:

- -Bulgarian News Agency;
- -Bulgarian National Television;
- -BG ON AIR (national coverage)
- -BTV Radio (national coverage)
- -Newspaper "24 hours";
- -Newspaper "Trud"

CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

"PATH OF KNOWLEDGE"

Sofia:

From 26.10 to 03.11.2024 from 10:00 to 22:00. in Mall "Serdika Center", level -1;

29.10.2024 - main entrance of UMBAL "Sveta Anna";

Varna:

10/29/2024 at the entrance to the UMBAL "Sveta Marina";

Burgas:

29 and 30.10.2024. in the building of the Heart and Brain Hospital - Burgas;

Veliko Tarnovo:

29.10.2024 at 9:30 a.m. in the "Dr. Stefan Cherkezov" Hospital, the conference hall, together with

students;

16:00 in Mall Veliko Tarnovo;

14.11.2024 in UGS "St. ST. CYRIL AND METHODIUS"

Pleven

29 and 30.10.2024. in the building of the Heart and Brain Hospital - Pleven;

Stara Zagora

29.10.20241:30 a.m. in the building of the University Hospital "Prof. Dr. Stoyan Kirkovich",

Northern Gate:

Blagoevgrad

29.10.2024 in the building of the Rector's Office of South-West University "Neofit Rilski";

Silistra

On 29.10.2024, in front of the municipal building:

Shoumen

On 29.10.2024, from 10:00 a.m. in diagnostic-consultative-centre-1 Shumen.

Results achieved

Map of the activities carried out, photos and publications in the media













Mall "SERDIKA CENTER"



UMBAL "Sveta Anna"















"Dr. Stefan Cherkezov" Hospital





Mall Veliko Tarnovo





UGS "St. ST. CYRIL AND METHODIUS"



(P) BLAGOEVGRAD











South-West University "Neofit Rilski"





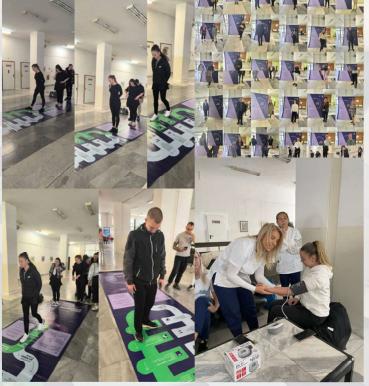












STARA ZAGORA







University Hospital "Prof. Dr. Stoyan Kirkovich"



O PLEVEN



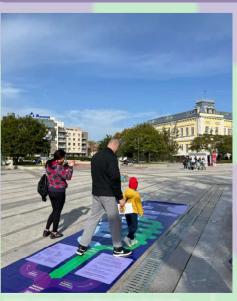
Heart and Brain Hospital







TOWN SQUARE



SHUMEN



DIAGNOSTICCONSULTATIVE-CENTRE-1



MOBILE AND INFORMED

This year, the partnership of the ASA with Sofia Municipality, represented by Sofia Metropoliten and Sofia Electric Transport, turned into permanent collaboration. With the start of the campaign a new, two-minute information clip about stroke began to be broadcast on the screens of all metro stations in the city of Sofia. The video presents information about the scale of stroke in Bulgaria, stroke symptoms and presents Stroke Infobot as a universal pocket guide about stroke. Broadcast plan:

period 1 - from 28.10. until 03.11.2024, incl.; period 2 - from 12.05. until 18.05.2025, incl.

During the days of the campaign (from 28.10 to 03.11.2024), the video was also broadcasted on the screens of trams and trolleys in the city of Sofia. For the first time, the Sofia Metropoliten(Subway), with the approval of Municipality, agreed to broadcast a short clip on stroke prevention all year round! This is crucial for improving our society's stroke awareness. Approximately 19% of the country's population lives in the capital, And the metro is used by an average of 64 million. passengers per year (According to data for 2021), It has 47 metro stations. This means that on average more than 5,000 passengers pass through each station every day, and they will see the information video. This gives real opportunities within 1 year the information about stroke to be received and distributed among more than 15% of the country's population.

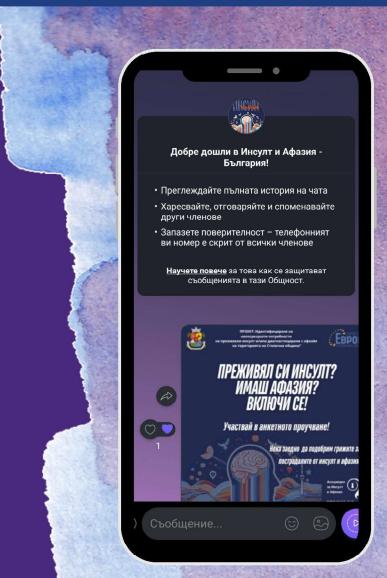


CONSOLIDATING THE STROKE COMMUNITY

ALONG WITH ALL THE EFFORTS THAT THE ASSOCIATION FOR STROKE AND APHASIA MAKES FOR ACTIVE STROKE PREVENTION AND INCREASING THE STROKE AWARENESS OF OUR SOCIETY, DURING THE CURRENT NATIONAL CAMPAIGN "BE PREPARED! RECOGNIZE THE STROKE. ACT FAST!" ON THE OCCASION – 29.10.2024. – WORLD STROKE DAY, WE ALSO LAUNCHED A NEW INITIATIVE – VIBER COMMUNITY "STROKE AND APHASIA". THIS COMMUNITY IS A RESPONSE TO THE NEEDS OF THE STROKE SURVIVORS, THEIR FAMILIES, RELATIVES AND CAREGIVERS. SUCH AS:

- QUICK ACCESS TO USEFUL INFORMATION,
- FREE EXAMINATIONS,
- SCREENING CAMPAIGNS,
- NEW REHABILITATION OR MEDICAL SERVICES AND MANY MORE.

JOINING THE VIBER COMMUNITY IS COMPLETELY FREE AND DOES NOT REQUIRE REGISTRATION. WE CALL ON EVERYONE AFFECTED TO GET INVOLVED, WHICH WILL IMPROVE COMMUNICATION IN OUR COMMUNITY ON IMPORTANT TOPICS FOR ALL OF US.



PARTNERSHIP WITH MUNICIPALITIES IN BULGARIA



The Association for Stroke and Aphasia has been successfully partnering with municipalities in Bulgaria for the past 4 years. With most of them we have signed agreements for cooperation in stroke prevention, based on our joint work and the awareness for synergy. The Association for Stroke and aphasia sent this appeal to all municipalities:

<u>Appeal to all municipalities in Bulgaria:</u>

"DEAR LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

Our society has reached the limits of tolerance regarding stroke as the main cause of death and disability in the country! The time has come when concrete, measurable and clearly targeted actions must be taken, in order to resist with knowledge and strong will, to demonstrate care for our own and for our loved ones' health!

Join the National Campaign of the Association for Stroke and Aphasia "Be prepared! Recognize the symptoms of stroke. Act fast!" starting on 29.10.2024. Inform the public about stroke!

Be active!"

Bulgarian municipalities joined the campaign by distributing electronic materials about stroke symptoms, as well as by publicizing the benefits of Infobot for Viber, free digital tool created by the Association for Stroke and Aphasia – free guide to all knowledge about stroke. It includes rich information materials, accessible through an intuitive menu, which allows quickly to evaluate one's personal risk of sufferring a stroke, information on risk factors for stroke and even an algorithm for checking whether a person's condition is related to the onset of a stroke.

INSPIRATIONS FROM THE PLACE OF ACTION

THE MUNICIPALITY OF ROMAN PRINTED ITS OWN MATERIALS

Despite the fact that different municipalities in Bulgaria have different and often disproportionate budgets to their needs, we were surprised by the enthusiasm of some of the small municipalities that rushed into the campaign with all their enthusiasm. Such is the example of the municipality of Roman, where they printed information materials themselves, using the resources on the association's website (stroke.bg).









THE DAUGHTER OF THE MAIN NEUROLOGIST OF THE HOSPITAL IN SILISTRA ORGANIZES VOLUNTEERS

It is difficult to find volunteers in Silistra, but this cannot prevent the enthusiasm of young people. Finding out about the difficulties faced by the head of the neurological department in the city, his daughter gathered her classmates, together with whom they successfully conducted the campaign. Thus, many Silistra residents passed through the Path of Knowledge and received information materials.



PATH OF KNOWLEDGE IN FRONT OF THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE

We are also extremely impressed by the ingenuity of the team of the University Hospital "St. Marina" - Varna, who, after the successful campaign, installed the path in the corridor in front of the neurological department. Thus, all patients who visit this clinic, as well as their relatives, have the opportunity to absorb critical information about stroke.



VOLUNTEERS IN ACTION



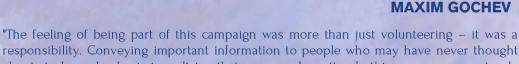
TANYA AIRST

"It is priceless to help prevent human suffering! I am very glad that I had the opportunity to help both young and old to learn about the risk factors for stroke in a more relaxing fun way that arouses their interest! I gave out a lot of brochures with information and also with a link to the stroke riskometer - to be able to personally measure their risk factors. Among the visitors happened to be a cardiologist. She was very intrigued by the campaign and asked for additional brochures to distribute to her patients. At the end of the day, I was truly satisfied!"



DANIELA PETROVA

"I want to express my gratitude to the ASA for inviting me to participate as a volunteer in events of the association. For me, it was one of the most fulfilling and productive time invested. In my estimation, in 2024, the ASA has done a lot to improve people's awareness of stroke and aphasia and launched a long-delayed social dialogue on post-hospital care for stroke survivors and their families. The example of concrete actions in this direction, which the ASA gave, set in motion a process of changing the attitude of medical and other institutions to post-hospital support for patients. I thank the Board of ASA and all members of the Association who make daily efforts so that stroke survivors and their families can receive support."



about stroke and aphasia is realizing that your words matter. In this process, you not only help, but also learn – you see reactions, hear personal stories, feel the real need for more awareness. This made me realize how fragile our health is and how important it is to take care not only of ourselves, but also of others. At the end of the day, it's empathy and the desire to be useful that make society a better place for all of us."



TEODORA SHARKOVA

"Thank you for the opportunity to join the campaign and get the feeling that one person, sharing experience and valuable information, can help others avoid the difficult path of recovery (or irreversible consequences)- invaluable experience."

DESISLAVA NATOVA

"I believe in the value of awareness campaigns organised by the Stroke and Aphasia Association and am happy to support them. I know that a large percentage of people are affected by stroke and its consequences, and the best way to protect ourselves is by becoming aware of the risk factors and being mindful of our lifestyle. It is therefore extremely important that the most precise information reaches as many people as possible. And working with the passionate team - Dorina Dobreva and Georgi Georgiev - is a real pleasure."



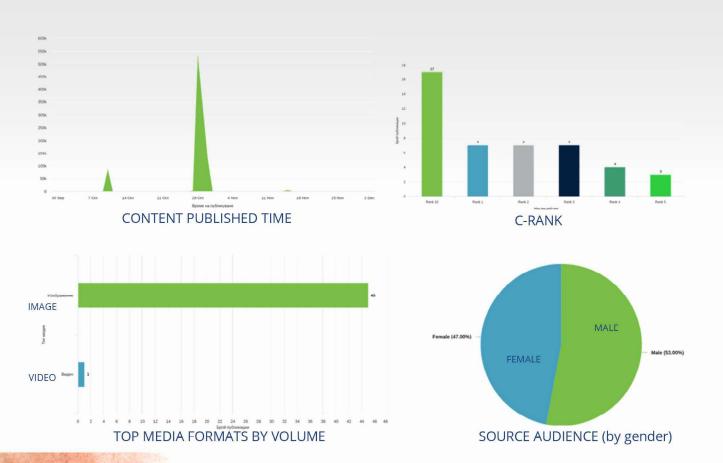
EVGENII NATOV

of making someone's life easier. That's how people get closer and maybe better. So when I found out about the Stroke and Aphasia Association's activities I didn't think twice and was happy to get involved. The problem with stroke and its consequences is very serious and there is a need to spread useful information to more people.



MEDIA COVERAGE





We thank the Sensika team for the opportunity to measure fully and correctly the results we have achieved!





WSD 2024 in Bulgaria

