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Hypersexual Behavior Following a Stroke

Q. My aunt suffered a cerebrovascular accident (CVA) recently and was transferred to a rehabilitation institute. While there, she developed some unusual behavior patterns, including using profanity, making sexual comments to other patients and her doctors, and attempting to undress in common areas. Our family did not know what to make of this behavior because she had always been "prim and proper." The therapist at the institute told us that these types of personality changes are not uncommon in patients with certain types of brain lesions. Any thoughts?

A. Hypersexual behavior following CVA is a very important topic, but one that is rarely discussed with stroke survivors and their families. Sexual functioning in these patients is known to be complex and multifaceted. Although cerebrovascular disorders usually result in a dramatic decrease in patients' sexual thoughts, behaviors, and activity, some patients may develop a disorder called *hypersexuality*.¹

Hypersexuality is best described as an unusual increase in sexual desire or sexual activity. It typically manifests as inappropriate behavior in relation to others, including use of lewd or suggestive language, fondling, flirtation, disrobing oneself or others, and displays of other overt sexual acts. Because the sexual behavior is unusual and involves a marked *increase* in sexually-oriented activity, it is known as *hypersexuality*.² It may begin insidiously with a few troubling incidents, and slowly escalate to a chronic problem.³ Hypersexuality may

appear several months after a person has a stroke, and can appear if the patient has a history of post-stroke seizure activity.¹

Klüver-Bucy Syndrome and Other Manifestations of Brain Damage

Your aunt may have a condition known as Klüver-Bucy syndrome (KBS), which results from brain damage related to injury, stroke, seizures, or Parkinson's disease. Patients with KBS may fail to publicly observe society's sexual norms, and may demonstrate an increase in

sexual activity.⁴ Some KBS sufferers who displayed heterosexual behaviors all their life may begin displaying homosexual behaviors.⁵ Other features include a flat affect notable for imperviousness to fear or anger. In addition to mood changes, many patients with KBS experience extreme weight gain. Some also suffer from *psychic blindness*, an inability to visually recognize familiar objects.⁴

Your aunt may have experienced some damage to the frontal or temporal lobe of the brain, specifically in areas related

