

FED:Reporter had classic signs of mini-stroke

By Danny Rose, AAP Medical Writer

SYDNEY, Feb 16 AAP - When footage of a US TV reporter delivering her Grammys report in apparent gobbledygook was posted on YouTube it went viral, prompting a rash of online jokes at her expense.

But the video should fuel concern, not laughs, a stroke expert says.

Serene Branson's garbled attempt to deliver a Grammy Awards report during the CBS2 news on Sunday has been watched the world over via the online video sharing site, where it has sparked numerous parody videos.

She also became the butt of an avalanche of jokes on blogs, Twitter and even news sites.

Professor Linda Worrall said the reporter showed the classic signs of having a "mini-stroke" on camera. The immediate reaction to it showed widespread ignorance about stroke, she said.

"Stroke is the third biggest killer in the western world and the most disabling disease in the western world," Prof Worrall told AAP.

"What you're seeing is that it doesn't normally happen to young beautiful women on the TV, at the Grammys, in full camera.

"But it is a very common disorder."

Prof Worrall is Professor of Speech Pathology at the University of Queensland, and her research has focused on the area of communicative disorders and rehabilitation.

She said the reporter showed the telltale signs of aphasia - an interruption to the part of the brain which controls speech - as well as dysarthria or paralysis affecting the face, lips, tongue and jaw.

"You could see the left-side of her face start to have a facial droop as well," Prof Worrall said.

"It was a temporary loss of language and that can be the result of a transient ischemic attack (TIA) which is a mini-stroke."

Migraine or an epileptic seizure could have a similar effect, she said, though any TIA-like incident should be treated as seriously as a heart attack.

Its effects can be temporary, as it appeared to be in this case, though a TIA could also result in permanent disability and it was a warning sign for a major stroke.

People suffering a TIA should "get to hospital as quickly as possible", Prof Worrall said, where blood-thinning drugs could be administered to ease pressure on the brain.

The reaction showed many people were "not taking the signs of stroke very seriously" and those unable to recognise the signs were "putting their own health at risk and those of the people around them".

Smoking, diabetes and high blood pressure all increase a person's risk of stroke but they can also have a solely genetic cause.

"I've seen one happening in front of me, with a patient, but not on camera," Prof Worrall also said of the rarely filmed apparent TIA.

"I would hope (Ms Branson) would use this in a positive way, to say these are the signs of having a stroke therefore I encourage everyone to know what the signs are."

The reporter's employer has issued a statement saying Ms Branson was examined by paramedics but her vital signs were normal and she "hopes to be back on the air very soon".

"As many of you know CBS2 reporter Serene Branson experienced some health-related problems last night during our post-Grammys newscast," the statement reads.

"And while Serene says she is feeling better today, she wants us to know she followed-up with a visit to the doctor for some medical tests."

The situation echoes events on Queensland television in late 2006 when rugby league great turned sports newsreader Wally Lewis experienced an on-air freeze, and appeared disorientated, during a broadcast of Brisbane's Nine Network News.

Lewis later revealed he had epilepsy and was on medication to control seizures. He went on to have brain surgery in early 2007.

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