

Stroke is the most serious neurological disorder in Europe and United States, comprising half of all patients admitted to hospital for a neurological disease. This is largely a reflection of the ageing population. The incidence of first stroke is different between the different studies mainly due to the variation of local age of studied population. In Italy the sepivac study carried out in centre of Italy showed an incidence of 2.45 per 1000 per year. The rate adjusted for European population is 1.55 per 1000 per year (Ricci, Celani et al. 1991). The prevalence of disabled survivors of stroke disease is around 360 per 100.000 throughout Europe (Wade and Hewer 1987). Increased survival after stroke and the aging of the general population are contributing to an enlarging group of disabled stroke survivors.

According to the Stroke Data Bank, the breakdown of the different causes of stroke is 70% ischemic infarct, of which 9% are due to large-artery occlusion, 5% are due to tandem arterial pathology, 26% are lacunar, 19% are from a cardiac source, and 40% are of uncertain cause (Foulkes, Wolf et al. 1988).