Chrisette Michele uses her voice to fight stroke... *by Toiya Honore*

When Linette Payne, mom of R&B singer Chrisette Michele suffered a stroke, it was a very emotional experience for Chrisette and her siblings. Linette has always taught her children to eat healthfully and to take care of their bodies. "It was scary to see someone who has taken such good care of her kids, suffer a stroke," said Chrisette. After the stroke, her mother was incoherent with slurred speech and memory loss. "My mother is a very smart woman. She has a Master's degree and was a teacher for 25 years, which she put on hold after my college graduation. She then became my manager and due to the nature of this business, she worked and over worked herself and didn't take the time to take care for herself and she suffered a stroke."

According to the American Stroke Association, a division of the American Heart Association, a stroke occurs when a blood vessel that carries oxygen and nutrients to the brain is either blocked by a clot or bursts. When that happens, part of the brain cannot get the blood and oxygen it needs, so it starts to die. If blood can't reach a part of the brain that controls a specific body function, that part of the body won't work well and may result in disability or death.

“Learn to recognize a stroke and call 9-1-1 immediately at the first onset of stroke, because the longer you wait, the more brain cells die. Stroke is the third leading cause of death and a leading cause of severe, long-term disability in America; however, it is largely preventable,” says Dr. Rani Whitfield, a board certified family practitioner in Baton Rouge, La. and American Heart Association/American Stroke Association spokesperson.

“While some risk factors such as age, ethnicity and family history of cardiovascular disease are not preventable, there are some things you can do to reduce your risk: Eat a balanced, portion controlled diet emphasizing a variety of fruits, vegetables, grains, low-fat or non-fat dairy products, fish, legumes and sources of protein low in saturated fat; Get physically active at least 30 minutes a day, most days of the week; Don’t smoke, and schedule regular visits with your doctor,” says Dr. Whitfield.

Despite the history of cardiovascular disease in Linette’s family, she never thought that she would have a stroke. “My maternal grandmother had a heart condition and my paternal grandmother suffered from stroke and because of the lack of record keeping in my family, my mother wasn’t fully aware of that history. It’s important to keep health records and to know your family history. Prevention is my motto,” says Chrisette.

Because stroke is all too familiar to Chrisette, she joined the American Heart Association as a spokesperson for the Power To End Stroke cause campaign speaking to young people about stroke.

A recent stroke awareness survey reveals that nine out of ten 18 to 24 year olds believe they are living healthy