Cone Health has launched two new education and support groups — one focused on patients recently diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease and another for those battling the aftermath of a stroke. Both were created by therapists with the Cone Health Neurorehabilitation Center and are offered free of charge to patients, family members and care partners.

Physical therapist Amy Marriott says that Power over Parkinson’s grew out of the work she and her colleagues were doing with newly diagnosed patients. The new group is led by Marriott and by occupational therapist Angela Freeman.

“We found there were a lot of common questions, fears and concerns that come with a Parkinson’s diagnosis,” Freeman says. “We decided to form a group that could empower newly diagnosed patients and provide them with the information and resources they need. Our goal is to help them be more proactive, take control of their diagnosis and live better through exercise and lifelong activity.”

Declaring war on stroke
A second support group founded recently by the Cone Health Neurorehabilitation Center is aptly called Stroke Warriors. It is led by physical therapist Dana Nicoletta and by occupational therapist Kelly Ballie.

“Our goal is to help those with recently diagnosed stroke stay active, learn to be healthier and fight the risk of a future stroke,” Nicoletta says.

The group was created by a team of physical, occupational and speech therapists and others experienced in working with stroke patients. Recent topics have included nutritional changes that can help to reduce risk factors, fitness programs, resources for caregivers and strategies that can help a patient compensate for lingering stroke symptoms and perform daily activities more safely and independently.

“We see more than 100 new stroke patients each year at the Cone Health Neurorehabilitation Center,” Nicoletta says. “We want to make certain they feel empowered to take charge of their health and wellness and to live a full life.”

Stroke Support Group The Stroke Warriors support group meets monthly on the second Thursday of each month, and the Power over Parkinson’s support group meets the third Tuesday of each month. Both meet from 4 to 5 p.m. at the Cone Health Neurorehabilitation Center.

An estimated 60,000 Americans are diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease each year.

— The Parkinson’s Disease Foundation
Parkinson’s patient builds a community of support

When Mary Ann Wyatt was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease, it confirmed what she already suspected. “I noticed I had begun to drag my left foot when I walked and I wasn’t swinging my left arm,” she says. “Then a tremor developed, and I knew what was going on.”

Stood up to diagnosis

Wyatt was just 61 at the time and living a full and active life. She wasn’t prepared to take her diagnosis lying down. Working with a physical therapist at the Cone Health Neurorehabilitation Center, Wyatt learned helpful tips for coping with the disease — from how to navigate steps more steadily to how to use hiking sticks to keep her stride steady when walking for exercise. She also joined a “Silver Sneakers” fitness class at the YMCA.

“I’ve found exercise is good for the brain and for the muscle stiffness that is common with Parkinson’s,” she says.

Reached out to others

Perhaps most important of all, Wyatt formed her own support group by reaching out to other women she knew had been diagnosed with the disease. They’ve named themselves the “Movers and Shakers.”

“There are now seven of us, and we have a great time,” she says. “We have lunch once a month to share information and discuss our experiences. Several of us went to a symposium on Parkinson’s together, and we walked as a group earlier this year in an event to raise money for research. We’re very proactive.”

Her advice to others with the disease? “First, work with a doctor you know you can trust and who will make you feel all is not lost,” she says. “There is hope, and new treatment options are being introduced. But in the meantime, it’s also important to just keep plugging along and live an active life.”

Free education and support groups

Cone Health Neurorehabilitation Center
912 Third St., Suite 102
Greensboro, NC 27405

- Power over Parkinson’s
  Meets monthly on the third Tuesday • 4 to 5 p.m.
  For information: Amy Marriott or Angela Freeman, 271-2054

- Stroke Warriors: Achieving Wellness after Stroke
  Meets monthly on the second Thursday • 4 to 5 p.m.
  For information: Dana Nicoletta or Kelly Ballie, 271-2054

Common Parkinson’s symptoms
- Muscle tremor
- Slowness of movement
- Rigidity of the arms, legs and trunk
- Impaired balance and coordination

Source: The Parkinson’s Disease Foundation