

## Health Link

### It's Time to Have the S-Talk

Immediately recognizing and responding to the warning signs of stroke can significantly improve survival and recovery.

But according to the Heart & Stroke Foundation, only 35 per cent of stroke survivors actually get emergency care and treatment within the first three and a half hours – the critical time when clot-busting drugs are most effective.

A stroke is a sudden loss of brain function caused by an interruption of blood flow to the brain (ischemic stroke or transient ischemic attack, also known as a mini-stroke) or the rupture of blood vessels in the brain (hemorrhagic stroke). A stroke causes brain cells in the affected area to die, and others to temporarily malfunction. The effects of a stroke depend on where the brain was injured, as well as how much damage occurred. The longer the brain goes without blood, the more brain cells are affected, and the greater the risk of permanent brain damage. This damage may impact any number of areas including the ability to move, see, swallow, remember, speak, reason, read and write.

Here in Muskoka we are fortunate to have a District Stroke Centre at Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare's Huntsville District Memorial Hospital site, offering stroke patients access to the latest technology and treatment.

For the past six years, a specially trained stroke team has been available to assess a stroke patient to provide thrombolytic treatment to eligible patients utilizing the clot-busting drug tPA.

Through the District Stroke Centre, physicians at Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare can administer the tPA drug to stroke patients, which has the ability to drastically reduce the effects of stroke in patients where the stroke is caused by a blood clot.

Stroke and the effects of stroke are treatable, especially if you recognize the warning signs and respond immediately by calling 9-1-1.

"Timing is critical when it comes to treating stroke patients," says Charlene Quan, District Stroke Nurse for Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare. "If a patient meets the

necessary criteria for treatment, we have a limited window from the onset of a stroke to administer the drug that could drastically reduce and in some cases reverse the effects of a stroke.”

She says the earlier the drug is given the more likely it is that a patient will have a good outcome. Public education about the signs and symptoms of a stroke and the need to respond quickly are keys to success.

“There is a tendency for some people to shrug off the symptoms of a stroke,” she said. “Recognizing and responding immediately to the warning signs of stroke significantly impacts survival and recovery.”

The five warning signs of a stroke include:

- Sudden loss of strength (weakness) or sudden numbness in the face, arm or leg
- Sudden difficulty speaking or understanding (confusion)
- Sudden trouble with your vision
- Sudden severe and unusual headache
- Sudden loss of balance (dizziness)

In the last fiscal year, approximately 85 patients were assessed through MAHC’s District Stroke Centre.

The District Stroke Centre at MAHC is part of the Central East Stroke Network, one of 11 regional areas across the province who are implementing the vision of the Ontario Stroke System, Fewer Strokes, Better Outcomes.

*Health Link is an awareness column brought to you on behalf of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare.*