



## June is Stroke Month. Know the Signs / June 2011

Did you know that there are over 50,000 strokes in Canada each year? Fifteen per cent (14,000) of these individuals will die, making stroke the third leading cause of death in Canada.

What is a stroke? A stroke occurs when the flow of oxygen-rich blood to the brain is interrupted (ischemic stroke) or when the blood vessels in the brain rupture (hemorrhagic stroke). The interruption of blood flow, or the rupture of blood vessels, causes some of the brain cells in the affected area to die, and others to temporarily malfunction. 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 and write.

The good news is that stroke and the effects of stroke are treatable. The mainstay of treatment is rehabilitation. Other treatments may include clot-busting drugs and surgical or non-surgical (catheter based) procedures. Secondary prevention is equally important, and involves the treatment of stroke risk factors such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, obesity, and smoking.

Here in Muskoka, we are fortunate that Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare's – Huntsville District Memorial Hospital site has been designated as one of the few District Stroke Centres in the Province. This designation enables the physicians at Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare to offer stroke patients the clot-busting drug tPA. While there are no guarantees, this drug has the ability to drastically reduce the effects of stroke in some patients. The catch is that physicians have a limited time window after a stroke to administer the drug effectively, and providing the drug is not without its risks in some individuals. The earlier the drug is given the more likely it is that a patient will have a good outcome.

"To benefit from tPA the patient must receive it no more than 4.5 hours after the stroke begins," said Dr. Tim Lapp, Medical Lead for Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare's District Stroke Centre. "The sooner the stroke patient gets into the hospital the better."

"Everyone should be aware of the signs of stroke," said Rick Dewsbury, former Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare stroke patient. "If you're suspicious of anything at all, jump on it. Act right away."

Dewsbury experienced double vision and shortly thereafter difficulty speaking.

"We waited five minutes and then called 911. The ambulance was there in ten and when we wheeled into emergency a team was

waiting in the driveway," said Dewsbury. "They confirmed that I did, in fact, have a blood clot and I received the drug tPA. Three hours after receiving the drug my speech was normal and I felt ready to go home. Mind you, they kept me in hospital for a couple of nights."

### The five warning signs of a stroke include:

1. **Sudden loss of strength (weakness) or sudden numbness in the face, arm or leg**
2. **Sudden difficulty speaking or understanding (confusion)**
3. **Sudden trouble with your vision**
4. **Sudden severe and unusual headache**
5. **Sudden loss of balance (dizziness)**

After receiving initial acute care such as controlling blood pressure, checking sugars, receiving a brain CT scan, and possibly receiving tPA, each patient must journey down their own road to recovery. No stroke victim is alike. Some patients are relatively unaffected while others are seriously impaired for the rest of their lives.

"What you see the day of a stroke is not necessarily what you'll see six months out," said Dr. Lapp. "In fact, it's safe to say that eight out of ten stroke survivors will benefit from rehabilitation efforts."

The multidisciplinary rehabilitation team at Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare is dedicated to helping stroke patients recover as quickly as possible. Physicians meet with stroke patients regularly to monitor the risk factors for stroke; dietitians help to ensure appropriate nutrition and hydration is met particularly in patients with swallowing disorders; occupational therapists assess and treat a patient's ability to perform normal activities of daily living such as getting dressed and taking a bath as well as cognition and memory; physiotherapists work with the patient to restore mobility, balance and strength and establish a healthy exercise program; speech language pathologists work with restoring the ability to communicate; nurses manage medications and provide daily care; and activation therapists facilitate the physical, mental and spiritual recovery needs to return to life again.

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