

News Release

14 July 2010

Dorset County Hospital launches 24/7 thrombolysis service

150,000 people in the UK have strokes every year. Of these, 67,000 people die and many thousands are left disabled.

Across the county of Dorset, about 1,500 people will have a stroke each year and of these about one third will die and one third will have some disability, while the remaining third are left severely disabled. More than 10,000 people in Dorset are living with the long-term consequences of stroke.

Clot-busting drugs must be given within three hours of stroke symptoms starting to give people the best chance of recovery, and they can only be given to people who have had certain types of stroke. This is called thrombolysis.

Every year approximately 350 people in West Dorset will be admitted to Dorset County Hospital (DCH) having had a stroke and for the last four years the Stroke Team has provided a Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm thrombolysis service. This month the team has launched a round the clock 24 hour thrombolysis service so that people in West Dorset will now be able to get this treatment closer to home no matter what time of day or night they have their stroke.

The Dorset Cardiac and Stroke Network (a partnership of local NHS trusts, stroke patients and support groups) have led the developments of the thrombolysis service across all hospitals in Dorset and have provided training for doctors and nurses, and supported the Diagnostics Team at DCH in training all of the on-call radiographers in carrying out CT scans for stroke patients. These scans can now be seen on a laptop by the stroke consultant to assist in accurate diagnosis of the type of stroke. The installation of a telemedicine system in the DCH Emergency Department means that a stroke consultant can now be contacted any time via a laptop link which allows them to see and talk to the patient and emergency team without actually being present in the department.

The launch of the new 24 hour thrombolysis service will dramatically improve the chances of recovery from a stroke for those who are eligible to receive it. These clot-busting drugs need to be given as soon as possible after a stroke, ideally in the first hour, so it is vital that people recognise and respond to the signs of a stroke quickly by dialling 999.

DCH Consultant Stroke Physicians Dr Rob Williams and Dr Harald Pröschel emphasised the importance of speedy treatment.

Dr Williams said: "Every minute that passes after symptoms start, two million brain cells die. This clot-busting treatment can help to reverse the damage caused by stroke."

Dr Pröschel added: "The earlier it is given, the more effective the treatment is, so I urge people to learn the FAST check."

- **Face** - Can the person smile? Has their mouth or eye dropped?
- **Arm weakness** - Can they raise both arms?
- **Speech problems** - Can you understand what they are trying to say?
- **Time to call 999** if you spot any of these symptoms

The role of the local ambulance service is also vital in getting patients to hospital as fast as possible. South Western Ambulance Service has been at the forefront of developing better stroke care, leading work on a national level. Deputy Clinical Director Adrian South commented: "The ambulance service has been working for the past six years with the hospital to enable an ever increasing number of patients to receive clot busting treatment following a stroke."

"This fantastic development at Dorset County Hospital means that Dorset is now the first county in the South West where thrombolysis is available 24/7. I would encourage everyone to learn the FAST test and remember that stroke is a medical emergency; if you suspect someone may be experiencing one, call 999 for an ambulance immediately."

The question of thrombolysis was raised at the NHS Dorset Health Question Time event held earlier this year. The event saw over 60 people attending the Weymouth and Portland National Sailing Academy in order to find out about local health services.

Part of the event gave people the opportunity to get their questions answered in an open session with NHS Dorset Chair Jacqueline Swift, Chief Executive Paul Sly and Partnership Manager Chris Ricketts.

Patient and public Involvement Development Manager for NHS Dorset Elise Ripley, helped organise the event. She said "We were delighted that so many people came along to the event and we hope that those who did found it both interesting and informative. This type of event gives us a great opportunity to meet with people and get feedback on local services."

The format of the session on Portland is something that we will be replicating in other localities throughout the year."

ENDS

For more information about this news release please contact communications manager Susie Palmer on 01305 254683 or susie.palmer@dchft.nhs.uk or DCH Stroke Services Development Manager Sue Gledhill on 01305 254371