

# Duplin General and EMS team-up to improve stroke care in county

KENANSVILLE—Duplin General Hospital is teaming up with Duplin County Emergency Medical Services (EMS) to create awareness and improve stroke care for residents of Duplin County.

Because of the development of fibrinolytic drugs, or clot busters, it is imperative for a person having stroke symptoms to receive a quick response from health care professionals. Research shows that a stroke sufferer needs to be evaluated within three hours of experiencing symptoms in order to receive medication to dissolve the clot.

"It's important to know the symptoms of a stroke," said Carolyn Ezzell, Duplin General Hospital community services and stroke program coordinator. "An easy way to remember is FAST, F—Facial Droop, A—Arm Weakness, S—Speech Problems, T—Telephone 911."

One of the problems found when reviewing past medical records from patients having strokes in our community is they waited too long to seek medical attention, thus they didn't qualify to receive the clot buster."

When a person recognizes they are having symptoms of a stroke, or they recognize symptoms in a family member or friend, 911 should be called immediately. EMS and hospital personnel have been

trained to recognize symptoms of a stroke through recent Advanced Stroke Life Support classes taught by Dave Cuddeback, paramedic and training officer with EMS.

"The goal is to transport stroke victims to the hospital as quickly as possible," said Cuddeback. "We do this by implementing our Load and Go protocol."

When EMS paramedics recognize symptoms of a stroke in a patient, they alert the DGH Emergency Department (ED) of a possible Code Stroke. The ED then pages appropriate staff to be on standby for the patient's arrival.

The ED patient care goal is to have a possible stroke patient evaluated within a 45-minute window of arrival at the hospital. The staff conducts physical exams that may include a CT scan (computerized tomography), laboratory tests, EKG (electrocardiogram) and consults with a neurologist. After compiling test results, the ED physician determines if the patient qualifies for medication to dissolve the clot.

Fibrinolytic drugs cannot be given to a patient if the stroke is caused by a hemorrhage, which is bleeding in the brain. A CT scan of a patient's brain can help determine if a hemorrhage has occurred.

DGH utilizes a state-of-the-art, 64-slice CT system.

Scans are read immediately during the day by a radiologist on staff at the hospital. After regular business hours and on weekends, the scans are transmitted digitally for an Eastern Radiologists specialist in Greenville to interpret and report back to Duplin General Hospital staff within 15 minutes.

"We were able to exceed our goal with a recent patient by completing the full evaluation within 40 minutes," said Dr. Yousef Naji, medical director of Duplin General Hospital's ED. "The patient did receive the medication to help dissolve the clot and decrease damage to surrounding brain tissue."

"This patient had a large blood clot, and if he had not received the fibrinolytic, his disability would probably have been much worse," stated Marie Welch, MSN, RN, CCRN clinical nurse specialist and stroke center coordinator with the Stroke Program at Pitt County Memorial Hospital where the patient was transferred.

Duplin County has been identified by the North Carolina Stroke Care Collaborative as having a higher number of strokes than the state average. The state average is 61.1 deaths per 100,000 people per year. Duplin County's average is 87 deaths per 100,000 people per year due to stroke. Duplin General Hospital is



Submitted photo

Carolyn Ezzell (L), Duplin General Hospital community services and stroke prevention coordinator, and Dave Cuddeback paramedic and training officer with Duplin County Emergency Services, are working together to create awareness and improve stroke care for residents in Duplin County.

involved with the N.C. Stroke Care Collaborative as well as the Eastern N.C. Stroke Network (a group involving 30 hospitals in eastern N.C.) to help improve care provided to victims of stroke and awareness of stroke prevention.

Duplin General Hospi-

tal and EMS are launching a campaign to educate the public about stroke awareness.

For additional information or if a civic or church group would like a presentation contact Ezzell at 910-296-2810 or Cuddeback at 910-271-0009.