

September 5, 2014

Follow AHS_Media on Twitter 

New program improves stroke survivors' quality of life

Clients benefit from home/community-based rehabilitation services

MEDICINE HAT — Stroke survivors in Medicine Hat and surrounding areas are now able to receive expert stroke rehabilitation in their homes, thanks to a provincewide Alberta Health Services (AHS) program aimed at improving stroke care in rural and small urban areas.

Early Supported Discharge (ESD) enables stroke survivors to receive rehabilitation and other clinical care at their home after discharge from hospital, improving quality of life and reducing hospital stays for patients.

“We want to build relationships with our clients and help them to gain the tools to help them recover from a stroke and get back to as normal a life as they can, as fast as they can,” says local program leader Shayne Berndt. “It also ensures stroke patients have early and timely access to rehabilitation after their stroke.”

The in-home stroke support team, which brings therapy into the home of stroke survivors, is comprised of occupational, physical, speech-language and recreation therapists, a registered nurse, social worker and therapy assistants. The group works together with a client following their discharge from hospital and may enable an individual to be discharged sooner.

“The average length of hospital stay for new stroke patients is about 11 days,” says Berndt. “Through the ESD program, we want to start by reducing this by at least two days so people can get back to their lives and the things they love doing.”

The program, which launched in Medicine Hat in May, has reduced by half the average length of hospital stay for stroke patients in Calgary and Edmonton.

Up to two-thirds of stroke survivors require some form of rehabilitation following hospital discharge. Mild stroke survivors can receive up to six weeks of therapy and moderate stroke survivors up to eight weeks.

“Research shows intensive rehabilitation of up to three hours per day provided in the first three to six months following a stroke can make a big difference in a survivor’s recovery,” says Berndt.

Through the program, patients set their own goals and receive support from the stroke support team. For some, a goal might be learning how to mow the lawn with impaired peripheral vision, or it might mean working on speech or cognitive issues.

David Worth, one of 15 patients who have received care and rehabilitation through the program, had a stroke in June and recently completed four weeks of treatment with the stroke support team. He wanted to improve his balance and relearn how to ride a bicycle.

.../2

Follow AHS_Media on Twitter 

“The entire team has been great,” says Worth. “There’s no way I would have been able to make the improvements I’ve made so quickly without them. I’m very motivated to get better and they provided all the tips, skills and confidence I need to keep working at it.”

The program is made possible through the Stroke Action Plan (SAP), a provincewide project led by the Cardiovascular Health and Stroke Strategic Clinical Network, aimed at improving the quality of stroke care in rural and small urban areas. Earlier this year, ESD programs also started in Red Deer and Lethbridge.

“One of our goals is to improve the prevention, treatment and management of heart disease and stroke across the province,” say Dr. Blair O’Neill, Senior Medical Director of the Cardiovascular Health and Stroke SCN. “The Stroke Action Plan will ensure stroke patients receive the same level of care, everywhere in the province – rural and urban.”

To participate in the program, stroke survivors must:

- Have experienced a mild or moderate stroke but be able to be safely discharged back home.
- Be medically stable and able to have medical needs met by home care (if required).
- Be expected to benefit from short-term intensive rehabilitation provided within the home/community.
- Be cognitively able and willing to participate in up to 15 hours of therapy/week.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than four million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

-30-

For media inquiries, contact:

Lisa Squires
AHS Communications
403-502-8619
403-581-9036 (cell)
Lisa.Squires@albertahealthservices.ca