

March 5, 2014

Follow AHS_Media on Twitter 

Stroke Action Plan to improve care throughout province

Red Deer the first of several centres to implement AHS initiative

RED DEER – Stroke survivors in central Alberta now have improved care in hospital and are able to receive expert stroke rehabilitation in their homes following the recent launch of a provincewide project aimed at improving stroke care in rural and small urban areas.

The Stroke Action Plan is designed to improve the quality of inpatient and community care for stroke patients outside of Edmonton and Calgary.

Red Deer is the first of several centres in Alberta to implement the initiative, which will be rolled out to communities across the province later this year.

“The Stroke Action Plan will take some of the successes we’ve had in large stroke centres and translate them to rural and small urban settings,” says Dr. Tom Jeerakathil, an Alberta Health Services (AHS) stroke neurologist and one of the project leads.

For patients who have had mild, moderate and severe strokes, this means improved care both during and after their stay in hospital.

The Stroke Action Plan uses provincial standards to ensure inpatient stroke care in small urban and rural settings is equivalent to the care delivered in larger centres, and that patients have early and timely access to rehabilitation services following admission for stroke.

Small urban sites will offer improved options for outpatient rehabilitation in the community, such as Early Supported Discharge (ESD), which brings therapy into the home of stroke survivors. The in-home rehabilitation team includes physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, therapy assistants, nurses, recreational therapists and social workers.

This program, now available in Red Deer, has reduced by half the average length of hospital stay for stroke patients in Calgary and Edmonton.

“Early Supported Discharge not only allows patients to return home sooner and regain their independence, but allows them to receive one-on-one rehabilitation while going about their daily activities,” says Jeff Wright, an AHS occupational therapist and project leader.

Elwood Kirkpatrick is among 20 stroke survivors in the Red Deer area who have been helped by the Stroke Action Plan since it launched last August.

The 77-year-old had a stroke last November and returned home after five days in hospital.

“Every day I was visited at home by a qualified team that would do all the necessary treatments to get me back to my normal lifestyle,” Kirkpatrick says.

“I’m so excited by my progress already. I can now walk on my own up and down the steps, my speech is returning to normal and I feel good about myself.”

As part of the Stroke Action Plan, Grande Prairie, Camrose, Lethbridge and Medicine Hat will receive enhancements to both inpatient and outpatient services, including the addition of Early Supportive Discharge teams.

Smaller centres – such as of Peace River, Westlock, Fort McMurray, Cold Lake, Wainwright, Lloydminster and Brooks – will receive enhancements of inpatient services for stroke patients, as well as improved stroke training and education.

The Stroke Action Plan was developed by the Cardiovascular Health and Stroke Strategic Clinical Network (SCN) of AHS.

“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.”

The Stroke Action Plan is one of nine projects undertaken so far by AHS’ Strategic Clinical Networks (SCNs), which are devoted to improving care in AHS priority areas: cardiovascular health and stroke; cancer care; seniors care; obesity, diabetes and nutrition; bone and joint health; addiction and mental health; surgery; critical care and emergency medicine.

SCNs are provincewide teams comprised of health care professionals, researchers, community leaders, patients and policy-makers, who are dedicated to developing care pathways in a specific area of health that will enhance the patient experience, improve outcomes and standardize care delivery across the province.

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:

Colin Zak
AHS Communications
587-893-0256