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Wisconsin Rural Hospitals Make Strides in Stroke Care

A project aimed at improving stroke care in rural Wisconsin has received national attention. At its national conference, the American Heart Association recognized the Wisconsin Rural Hospital Stroke Improvement Project as a successful national model for improving stroke education and treatment in rural areas.

Memorial Medical Center – Neillsville, along with 18 other rural Wisconsin hospitals, participated in the Project that was supported by the Wisconsin Hospital Association and the American Stroke Association with funding from the Wisconsin Office of Rural Health.

Hospitals worked in teams to identify methods that could be used to build the infrastructure necessary to deliver excellent stroke care, develop protocols for treating stroke patients, and standardize stroke care-related processes.

“2009 marks our second year of developing and implementing this stroke protocol. We now qualify as a non-certified stroke capable Emergency Department, meaning we are more streamlined and systematic when treating and stabilizing stroke patients, before transferring them to a primary stroke care center,” explained Ann Stallons, Certified Speech & Language Pathologist and Stroke Team Chairperson. “Of course, we hope they choose to come back to Memorial for follow-up care and therapy.”

Memorial Medical Center stroke team members include: Dr. Max Olesevich, Ann Stallons (Speech Therapy), Sarah Trunkel (Compliance Officer), Paul Harmer (Radiology), Darci Mahoney (Occupational Therapy), Lori Gregorich (Hospital Nursing), and Randy Magnus (Emergency Department Nursing).

“This Project was successful in bringing rural hospitals together to improve the level of care they provide in their communities,” according to Dana Richardson, WHA vice president, quality initiatives. “However, the most important element in stroke care starts with a family member or co-worker recognizing the signs of stroke and seeking immediate medical care,” she added.

Stroke is the third leading cause of death in Wisconsin. In the hospital, the early recognition and application of appropriate medical care is critical to improving patient outcomes. For family members and care givers, it is important to identify the signs of a stroke and seek immediate medical attention.

The warning signs of a stroke are:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause

“Memorial Medical Center provided training to other community organizations too, including EMS from Neillsville, Greenwood, Loyal, Black River Falls and Owen-Withee. We also have done outreach to senior citizens as well as our own staff. I think this project has really improved Wisconsin’s rural communities at being better equipped and better networked to provide quality care,” stated Stallons.

Neillsville

216 Sunset Place
Neillsville, WI 54456
p: 715.743.3101
f: 715.743.6245

Loyal

502 East Elm Street
Loyal, WI 54446
p: 715.255.8551
f: 715.255.8004

Greenwood

201 South Main Street
Greenwood, WI 54437
p: 715.267.3200
f: 715.267.3201

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19 rural hospitals participating in the Wisconsin Rural Stroke Project

Memorial Medical Center, Neillsville

Black River Memorial Hospital, Black River Falls

Riverview Hospital Association, Wisconsin Rapids

Ministry Health Care - Good Samaritan Health Center, Merrill

Divine Savior Healthcare, Portage

Moundview Memorial Hospital & Clinic Inc., Friendship

Spooner Health System, Spooner

Agnesian HealthCare, Fond du Lac

Ministry Health Care – Sacred Heart-St. Mary’s Hospital, Rhinelander

Oconto Hospital and Medical Center, Oconto

Community Memorial Hospital Inc., Oconto Falls

Fort HealthCare, Fort Atkinson

Grant Regional Health Center, Lancaster

Langlade Hospital – An Aspirus Partner, Antigo

Memorial Hospital of Lafayette County, Darlington

St. Joseph’s Hospital, Hillsboro

Stoughton Hospital, Stoughton

Waupun Hospital, Waupun

Westfields Hospital, New Richmond

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