New stroke unit ‘will save lives’

Steveanage, UK – 13 November 2007 – The new “life-saving” stroke unit at the QEII hospital in Welwyn Garden City was opened officially on Wednesday, 7 November. EastEnders star John Bardon – who was admitted to the facility in June this year after suffering a stroke – marked the occasion by cutting the ceremonial ribbon.

The unit, on Knebworth ward, has been in operation since October last year after the decision was made to bring together the Trust's stroke services and expertise into one location. Prior to the move, there was a good but small unit based at the Lister hospital in Stevenage and no specialist facility at the QEII. This meant that after arriving in A&E many stroke patients were scattered throughout general wards where access to specialist staff was limited. Consequently, hospital stays were often longer due to prolonged treatment and rehabilitation periods.

Explaining the benefits of the new unit, consultant physician Dr Declan O’Kane said: “Put simply, this unit will save lives. Now all stroke patients can be brought to one location, which allows them the benefit of all the expertise here and means they are not staying in general wards. Research shows that such stroke units save lives, reduce disability and allow patients to be discharged earlier into the care of community-based services*.”

Dr O’Kane said patients now had constant access to specialist stroke staff such as physio-, occupational, and speech and language therapists and nurses. And by concentrating their skills and dealing with more patients on a daily basis, the staff would in turn become even better at helping them.

“We can now take people much earlier and can take many more patients,” he said. “By centralising our expert staff who were working diffusely throughout the Trust, we are ensuring that the level of care for stroke patients is even greater.”

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Notes to editors

Picture caption: Photo 1 – John Bardon with Declan O’Kane and Chris O’Brien (stroke specialist nurse). Photo 2 – John Bardon with wife Enda (to his left) and the stroke team

The Trust's stroke unit (Knebworth ward) currently has 31 nursing staff (including two stroke specialist nurses), 5 occupational therapists, 5 physiotherapists, 2 speech and language therapists, 7 doctors (including 2 consultants), 1 porter, 1 social worker and 1 dietician. The unit has 29 beds and has seen more than 500 patients admitted so far this year.

Stroke facts

Every year, an estimated 150,000 people in the UK have a stroke. That’s one person every five minutes. Most people affected are over 65, but anyone can have a stroke, including children and even babies. Around 1,000 people under 30 have a stroke each year.

Stroke is the third most common cause of death in the UK. It is also the single most common cause of severe adult disability. More than 250,000 people in the UK live with disabilities caused by stroke.

A stroke is a frightening experience for both the stroke person and their family. It involves a lot of immediate medical treatment and sometimes months or years of ongoing rehabilitation.

10 things everyone should know about stroke

1. Every five minutes someone in the UK has a stroke.
2. A stroke is a brain attack. A stroke happens due to a clot or bleed in the brain, which causes brain cells to die.
3. The signs of a stroke are:
   • Facial weakness
   • Arm or leg weakness
   • Speech problems
   • A loss to half of the visual field
   These signs may only last a few minutes (called a Transient Ischaemic Attack – TIA) but must not be ignored.
4. A stroke is an emergency. If you see the signs of a stroke act FAST and call 999. Early treatment saves lives and increases the chance of making a better recovery.
5. Stroke is the third biggest killer and the leading cause of severe disability in the UK.
6. Almost one in four men and one in five women aged 45 can expect to have a stroke if they live to 85.
7. More than three times as many women die from stroke than breast cancer in the UK.
8. Unacceptable inadequacies in stroke care and research exist. For every £50 spent on cancer research and £20 on heart disease research, only £1 is spent on stroke research.
9. Eating healthily, taking more exercise, not smoking and ensuring blood pressure is normal, can all help to prevent stroke.
10. The Stroke Association is the only national charity solely concerned with helping everyone affected by stroke. It works to create a world where there are fewer strokes and all those touched by stroke get the help they need.

The information above is based on The Stroke Association’s website at www.stroke.org.uk Please state this when using this information in published articles.

* Patients are significantly more likely to be alive, independent, and living at home 1 year after a stroke if they have received specialized stroke rehabilitation (specialist unit/organized stroke team) vs. non-stroke unit. *Stroke* 2003; 34:101
For more information on this press statement, please call Peter Gibson, head of public affairs on: 01438 781522 or Steve Creswell, public relations officer on: 01438 781736 (both direct lines); for out-of-hours, please page the duty press officer on 07659 103839.