

7 September 2017

Putting the BEAST into stroke treatment

A new trial at Bankstown-Lidcombe Hospital is giving acute stroke sufferers improved chances of a better future by speeding up diagnosis.

The Hospital began the Bankstown Expedited Acute Stroke Treatment (BEAST) in July and Director of Emergency Medicine, Dr Matt Smith, said the results were already extremely encouraging.

"We started in July and we've already reduced the time to get the patient into a CT scan for diagnosis down from 22 minutes to 10 minutes," he said.

"It's really encouraging to see the BEAST protocol working so well."

BEAST is the first streamlined protocol that works with NSW Ambulance paramedics, the Emergency Department team, stroke specialists, radiology team and the pathology team to get a patient diagnosed and treated as quickly as possible.

"Every 15 minute delay in treating an acute stroke patient means there is a higher chance of permanent disability for the patient," Dr Smith said.

"Instead of having the ambulance bring the patient into the Emergency Department to be assessed and then having to move the patient into the CT, we're now having paramedics take the patients directly to the CT," Dr Smith said.

"We see approximately 20 strokes a month, but not all of those are suitable for acute stroke treatment with clot busting drugs or clot retrieval treatment and you can't tell whether the patient is suitable for the treatment - you need the scan.

"The expedited protocol means we're able to give suitable patients clot-busting drugs or get them transferred for endovascular clot retrieval procedure to remove the clot much quicker than before.

"Getting a patient into treatment quickly gives them a much better chance of leading a normal life after the stroke."

Dr Smith and Dr Fintan O'Rouke, Bankstown Hospital's stroke leader and their teams, have set up a dedicated runner whose job is take the bloods immediately to the pathology department where the pathology team process the blood tests immediately.

The hospital is also working with NSW Ambulance to have paramedics take blood from patients on route so the samples are ready for testing as soon as the patient arrives.

Dr Smith said timely diagnosis and treatment are the most important factors when it came to recovery after a stroke, a message the Stroke Foundation is also sending out during National Stroke Week, 4-10 September.

Factbox information:

The Stroke Foundation is raising awareness of the FAST checklist to ensure patients get the help they need as quickly as possible:

- **Face** – check their face, has their mouth drooped?
- **Arms** – can they lift both arms?

- **Speech** – is their speech slurred? Do they understand you?
- **Time** – Time is critical. If you see any of these symptoms Act FAST and call 000.