



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Telestroke Pilot Project will advance stroke care

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health has awarded grants totaling \$55,000 to establish a system to help purchase necessary equipment and training to extend improved stroke care expertise to hospitals in the Montgomery, Prattville and Andalusia areas.

In the pilot project, specialists will use videoconferencing technology to remotely examine the patient, confirm the diagnosis, interpret the brain images, and provide recommendations to the hospital's physicians. The project follows a "hub-and-spoke" model which will be created through a partnership with Baptist Medical Center South as the "hub" and Prattville Baptist Hospital and Andalusia Regional Hospital as the "spokes."

Dr. Steve Suggs, medical director of the Stroke Center at Baptist South, says the telemedicine service will save lives and reduce disability. "The grant monies are being utilized to enable technology that allows hospitals that don't have emergency neurology coverage to treat stroke patients in a timely manner."

Stroke is the leading cause of disability and one of the leading causes of death in the U.S. Alabama has one of the highest stroke mortality rates in the entire country. A conservative cost estimate for one stroke in Alabama is approximately \$140,000, including hospitalization, treatment and rehabilitation.

When treating an acute stroke patient, time is foremost. One of the most important treatments emergency room physicians use is Tissue Plasminogen Activator (tPA), a blood thinner which dissolves artery-clogging blood clots which cause most strokes. TPA may only be administered within three hours (and up to 4.5 hours in certain cases) following onset of stroke symptoms. Effective use of telestroke and timely use of tPA could decrease length of stay, rehabilitation, and nursing home costs.

"This project has the potential to dramatically improve quality of care given to stroke patients by saving precious time and delivering expert neurologic care to patients experiencing stroke symptoms," said Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer.

Additional benefits include eliminating unnecessary transfers and reducing costs through shorter hospitalizations and providing a more accurate and timely diagnosis.

The public is encouraged to become familiar with the symptoms of stroke, which are as follows:

FAST

Stroke is an emergency. If you are among the millions of Americans who are not yet familiar with the symptoms of stroke, here is a quick and easy way to remember how to recognize a stroke when it happens to someone you know. Remember the word FAST.

F = Facial Weakness

Can the person smile? Has his or her mouth or eyes drooped?

A = Arm Weakness

Can the person raise both arms? Is one arm slightly lower?

S = Speech/Sight Difficulty

Can the person speak or see clearly and understand what you say?

T = Time to Act

Time loss is brain lost. Call 9-1-1.

If a person experiences any of these symptoms or observes them in anyone else, call 9-1-1 at once. Evaluation and therapy are needed to obtain the best possible stroke outcome.

For more information on cardiovascular health, visit adph.org/cvh or <http://www.strokeassociation.org/STROKEORG>.