

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Long-distance stroke treatment launched in Fraser Valley

Telestroke, the telemedicine innovation that allows neurology specialists to examine, diagnose and help treat patients in distant hospitals, has been launched between Vancouver, Chilliwack and White-Rock/South Surrey.

"By providing rural and remote areas across the province with timely access to stroke specialists, we can save lives and reduce the debilitating damage caused by acute stroke," said Chilliwack MLA John Les.

With Telestroke technology, patients "see" a neurologist within minutes of arriving in emergency, regardless of how far apart they are. Emergency Departments at Chilliwack General Hospital (CGH) and Peace Arch Hospital (PAH) are able to connect by video conference with neurologists working out of Vancouver General Hospital. Emergency physicians can consult directly with neurologists to make timely decisions about treatments for their stroke patients.

Smaller hospitals such as CGH and PAH, with less neurology coverage than larger hospitals, must sometimes transport stroke patients for emergency consultations. The new Telestroke service at these hospitals enables on-demand, rapid access to a neurologist via videoconferencing. Transportation to another hospital can often be avoided, saving precious time. The sooner a stroke is treated, the less brain damage a patient sustains.

Telestroke is part of the BC Stroke Strategy, a comprehensive plan to improve stroke care across British Columbia, from prevention and awareness, to diagnosis and treatment, through to rehabilitation and community reintegration. Other Strategy initiatives include establishing and expanding TIA (or mini stroke) rapid assessment clinics; ensuring health care providers are aware of best practices around stroke through practice protocols, clinical guidelines and education; improving and coordinating hyper-acute (hot stroke) care; identifying primary improvement areas for stroke rehabilitation and community reintegration; and developing performance indicators and registries to measure improvements in stroke care across the system.

"Every year, over 7,500 British Columbians have their first stroke, and more than 55,000 British Columbians are living with the after-effects of a stroke," said Mark Collison, co-chair of the BC Stroke Strategy. "The good news is that we can change those outcomes. As part of the BC Stroke Strategy, we are developing plans and prototypes to improve stroke care right across the continuum of care - and eventually right across the province. Telestroke is an example of how the Strategy helps patients receive the right treatment, at the right time and in the right place. This Fraser Health - Vancouver Coastal Health integrated prototype will give us the information we need to expand Telestroke into other areas of the province."

Telestroke was launched in British Columbia by the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) in July 2009. As of March 31 2010, 27 patients in Nanaimo and Duncan have used Telestroke to access neurologist specialists in Victoria. The VIHA project tested videoconferencing technology and set up the process and protocols. The FH and VCH project shows how the system can operate across health authorities, opening the door to expanding Telestroke to communities across British Columbia.

The introduction of Telestroke to Fraser Health is an exciting milestone in our work to bring leading-edge stroke care to patients in all communities," says Dr. Nigel Murray, President and CEO, Fraser Health. "It also represents our strong commitment to work in a more integrated way with other health authorities, so we can provide quality care while making best use of health care resources."

"This joint project between Vancouver Coastal Health and Fraser Health illustrates nicely how cooperation, integration and technology can merge to benefit patient access to stroke care services across two health regions," said Mary Ackenhusen, Chief Operating Officer, Vancouver Coastal Health. "We are thrilled that Telestroke will allow VGH-based neurologists to expand their highly specialized reach into the community hospitals of the Fraser Valley."

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Backgrounder / Factsheet