Colchester Stroke Unit is the best in the county

Colchester’s stroke unit is the best in Essex and among the top 10% nationally, according to an audit published today (5th) by the Royal College of Physicians.

In the NHS Midlands and East region, only one hospital trust performed better and Colchester Hospital University NHS Foundation Trust is the 13th best performer out of 151 hospital trusts in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, Guernsey and the Isle of Man.

Today’s publication of the National Stroke Audit was welcomed by Dr Ramachandran Sivakumar, consultant stroke physician at the Trust and its clinical lead for stroke.

“Our strong performance is a tribute to the professionalism, talent and dedication of the 50 or so multidisciplinary staff who work on the Stroke Unit, including doctors, nurses and therapy staff,” he said.

“The audit covers the key aspects of the organisation of stroke services and shows how we compare nationally, which is very favourable.

“However, we are not complacent and we are still working to improve our service in the few areas where others are better than us.”

The detailed audit looked at many issues, including:

- levels of staffing, such as nurses and therapy staff (eg, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and speech and language therapists)
- communication between all the stroke team members
- provision of thrombolysis (clot-busting drugs, suitable for a minority of stroke patients)
- access to community rehabilitation services
- services for patients who experience a transient ischaemic attack (TIA or “mini-stroke”)
- patient involvement
- leadership
- research.

Last year (2011/12), more than 600 patients were admitted to Colchester General Hospital with stroke.

The Stroke Unit, which is located on the ground floor of Gainsborough Wing and has its own gymnasium, was opened in 2004 and was extended three years ago at a cost of £1.4m.

Staff on the unit work in an integrated way with Anglian Community Enterprise (ACE) who provide an Early Supported Discharge (ESD) service to ensure that patients continue to receive intensive rehabilitation after the acute episode of their stroke is over.

More follows
Most of the top-performing trusts in the National Stroke Audit are based in London where eight hyper-acute stroke units (HASUs) were created in 2010 to treat all patients in the period immediately after their stroke following the centralisation of the capital’s stroke services.

This process has resulted in better clinical outcomes as a consequence of concentrating skilled specialist teams in fewer hospitals.

The NHS Midlands and East region is currently going through a similar review process, which is likely to result in fewer hospitals delivering the hyper-acute element of stroke care.

Colchester, as one of the largest stroke units in the east of England, is keen to maintain its HASU service. The Trust will hear early next year if it has been successful and, if it is, whether it will also be asked to treat stroke patients from a wider area than north east Essex.

The National Stroke Audit, which has been published every two years since 1998, found that further improvements had been made across England, Wales and Northern Ireland since the last one was published in 2010.

The audit is part of the Department of Health funded national audit programmes and run by the Clinical Effectiveness and Evaluation unit (CEEu) of the Royal College of Physicians.

Every year, an estimated 152,000 people in the UK have a stroke, including 11,300 in East Anglia, and there are about 1.2 million stroke survivors.

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