

Stroke Care Clinical Network news

February 2009

Welcome

Welcome to the second newsletter for the Department of Human Services, Victorian Stroke Clinical Network (VSCN). This update includes reports from some of the Facilitators as well as information on other projects.

Victorian Stroke Clinical Network (VSCN)

2009 marks the commencement of VSCN's second year and we look forward to the challenges and opportunities of the coming year. It will be a challenging year as we seek to consolidate our achievements and build upon these foundations.

In 2007, the government committed \$5 million over three years to the implementation of the Stroke Care Strategy for Victoria.

During 2008 a number of key recommendations were addressed and this has set the scene for further development work. The appointment of a state-wide Program Manager and the site-based Stroke Clinical Network Facilitators has been critical to this progress.

The continued and dedicated efforts of the VSCN and its membership through participation in the Committee and Sub-committees have also been crucial. Members have also been active in supporting the work of the Clinical Network Facilitators locally and promoting the Stroke Care Strategy in a range of fora.

Stroke Clinical Facilitators

One of the major achievements to date is the appointment of Stroke Clinical Facilitators across the state.

The Facilitators have been reviewing stroke care services within their areas as a first step to identifying what needs to be done to improve services and support implementation of the Stroke Care Strategy.

Western Health

Western Health is comprised of three major hospitals (Footscray, Sunshine and Williamstown), two nursing homes and a Drug & Alcohol Centre. A comprehensive range of health and related services is offered to a population of nearly 700,000 people 33.9 percent of whom were born overseas. There are over 100 languages spoken in this area.

In June 2008 a stroke facilitator was appointed to Western Health and in collaboration with all key stakeholders a list of priorities and a strategic work plan have been developed to address current gaps and optimise opportunities in the delivery of acute and sub acute stroke services in the western area.

We have a dedicated team of doctors, nurses, allied health and many others that care for nearly 900 stroke and TIA patients each year.

The areas of priority include:

- acute stroke intervention – Thrombolysis and Transient Ischaemic Attack (TIA) Management
- acute Stroke Unit Structure & function
- Sub Acute Care – Inpatient Rehabilitation & Community based Rehabilitation
- Clinical pathways and protocols
- Education & Research.

All of the stroke teams are working incredibly hard to ensure that our community here in the west is able to access evidence based best practice stroke care across the patient continuum. We look forward to updating you all with our accomplishments as the project unfolds. For further information contact Adele.Mollo@dhs.vic.gov.au.

Northern Health

Northern Health have developed a framework for the implementation of The Stroke Care Strategy for Victoria recommendations. This framework has been developed through the completion of a gap analysis and the formation of the Northern Health Stroke Strategy Steering Committee. The committee members have identified priority areas for development:

- acute Stroke Unit Structure & function
- stroke/TIA pathways
- TIA clinics
- Processes to support thrombolysis.

Sub-acute stroke care will also be a focus.

Work plans are currently under development to initiate progress in these key areas. Northern Health is committed to providing excellence in stroke care and is working toward some exciting developments in this area. For further information contact Linda.Francis@dhs.vic.gov.au.

Peninsula Health

Peninsula Health is located in the southern metropolitan region of Melbourne, with Frankston Hospital the major facility. Frankston Hospital had over 760 acute stroke separations in 2007-08 while Rosebud Hospital had 162. A recent gap analysis revealed both strengths and challenges in Peninsula Health's current stroke services. As a result, key stakeholders involved in stroke care at Peninsula Health have convened a Stroke Strategy Steering Committee to oversee local implementation of the Stroke Care Strategy for Victoria.

Peninsula Health has a number of clinical champions, who are extremely motivated and working hard towards improving stroke services to meet the needs of patients and their carers and families. With the support of the stroke network facilitator, they are currently working on the following initiatives:

- Stroke study day for nursing, medical and allied health staff (November 2008).
- Presentation of Stroke Strategy and TIA management model at a General Practitioner education forum (November 2008).
- Commencement of TIA clinic forum (November 2008).
- Depression screening in sub-acute interdisciplinary care plans.
- Developing simplified protocols and pathways for rapid triaging and treatment of stroke patients.

For further information contact Marlena.Klaic@dhs.vic.gov.au.

Loddon Mallee Region - incorporating Bendigo Health

The Loddon Mallee region is situated in the north-west of Victoria and extends from Mildura in the far north, to the Macedon Ranges in the south.

Bendigo Health is the regional tertiary health and referral service for the Loddon Mallee Region. In 2007-08 Loddon Mallee cared for over 600 stroke and TIA cases with over half of these presenting to the emergency department at Bendigo Health, resulting in 190 admissions.

In May 2008, two Stroke Network Facilitators were appointed (job share) to the Loddon Mallee region. As part of their role at Bendigo Health, a collaborative analysis of available stroke services has been undertaken. This gap analysis has highlighted the strengths and opportunities for development of stroke services within this facility.

To date, two committees have been convened to develop, prioritise and implement work plans to optimise Stroke Services across Bendigo Health. The key priority areas identified through this process include:

- Development of policies and procedures for the use of thrombolysis for ischemic stroke.
- Development of a sustainable stroke unit model of care.
- Development of an evidence-based assessment and management plan for TIA presentations/admissions.
- Collaboration across the continuum of care.
- An out-of-hours Dysphagia screening service.

The process of assisting health services to evaluate current stroke service provision, capacity and demand is currently being undertaken by the Stroke Network Facilitators across the Loddon Mallee region. Thus far, Kerang and Swan Hill have been engaged in this process. The next health services to be engaged include Echuca and Cohuna, with further health service visits planned during the year to further this evaluation process. A Region wide Stroke Steering Committee will be formed with representation from each health service within Loddon Mallee. For further information contact Sharan.Ermel@dhs.vic.gov.au or Leanne.Muns@dhs.vic.gov.au.

Dysphagia Screening Project

Dysphagia (difficulty in swallowing) is common after stroke and is frequently associated with increased risk of complications such as aspiration pneumonia, airway obstruction, dehydration and malnutrition. Early identification is important. The Stroke Care Strategy recommends (Rec. 7) health services should provide acute stroke care in accordance with existing evidence-based clinical practice guidelines.

The National Stroke Foundation Clinical Guidelines for Acute Stroke Management (2007) states that patients should be screened for swallowing difficulties before being given food, drink or oral medications. Screening should be undertaken by personnel specifically trained in swallowing screening.

The aim of the VSCN Dysphagia Screening Project is to review current practices,

benchmark against national practices and develop a model for a consistent approach to dysphagia screening across Victoria that is in line with best evidence care.

A survey investigating current practice with dysphagia screening for acute stroke patients has been conducted across the state. A response rate of 76 percent was achieved. Only 32 percent of health services report conducting dysphagia screening. Out of the health services that do conduct dysphagia screening the type of tools used vary widely and only a small proportion use validated tools. For those health services not conducting screening many significant barriers and issues were reported that constrain its implementation.

A more detailed analysis of the data along with the project plan is currently in development. The department is also forming a Dysphagia Screening Steering Committee and a working party to support the development of a model for a consistent approach to dysphagia screening across Victoria. Please feel free to ask any questions by emailing Linda Francis at Linda.Francis@dhs.vic.gov.au.

National Stroke Week: 15-21 September 2008

All of the Stroke Clinical Network Facilitators took the opportunity of the 2008 Stroke Week to highlight their stroke services and raise the profile of stroke and its risk factors in their local community.

The following are photos of some of the activities undertaken.

Above: Prof. Disler (Bendigo Health) giving a Stroke Week health check.



Special congratulations to Clinical Facilitator, Marlena Klaic, and the team at Peninsula Health, for receiving a National Stroke Foundation Stroke Safe Award (equal first with Bankstown, NSW) for metro hospital teams!



Above: The Peninsula Health team and their 'National Stroke Week' road sign – getting the message across!

Stroke Care Workforce

The VSCN is very keen to support clinicians working in stroke care, to ensure that they have access to training and education opportunities.

2008 Smart Stroke Conference

In the first of these Newsletters we reported on the awarding of 20 scholarships to support Victorian clinicians to attend the 2008 Smart Stroke Conference in Sydney. Recipients of the scholarships were surveyed post Conference. The results of this evaluation showed that recipients valued the scholarship support as well as the Conference itself.

As well as clinical and research knowledge gained, participants felt the conference stimulated ideas and enthusiasm as well as providing excellent opportunities for professional networking and contacts.

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2009 Post Graduate Scholarships

More recently the VSCN has invited Nurses and Allied Health Professionals working in stroke care to apply for Post Graduate Scholarships to support study in 2009.

Applications closed on the 12 January 2009 and successful applicants will be notified in early February 2009. For further information contact Kathryn.Whitfield@dhs.vic.gov.au.

Stoke Palliative Care Project

This project (supported through a Commonwealth grant) aims to improve access to palliative care for people who have had a stroke and their carers. Project partners include; Melbourne Health, Melbourne City Mission, the West Metropolitan Palliative Care Consortium and DHS (Cancer and Palliative Care Unit & VSCN).

The Melbourne Health palliative care consultancy team recently recruited a Stroke Palliative Care Research Nurse to manage the palliative care/stroke project. We will provide further updates as the project develops. Further information will be available in upcoming issues.

Future Updates

This is the second in a series of information updates which we intend to produce on a quarterly basis.

The Department of Human Services maintains an e-mailing list of clinicians and other stakeholders interested in receiving information on VSCN activities. If you wish to be included on this e-mailing list please forward your details to clinicalnetworks@dhs.vic.gov.au or advise your local Facilitator.

Also, check out our Stroke Clinical Network website for more details of VSCN members, Facilitators and our projects. www.health.vic.gov.au/clinicalnetworks/stroke