

For Immediate release: Monday, Oct. 3, 2011 12:01 a.m ET

Ontario's 14 health networks get their first stroke report cards

OTTAWA, Oct. 3, 2011 - Ontario's Local Health Integration Networks (LHIN) are getting report cards to grade the delivery of stroke care in their regions – the first time this approach has ever been used in Canada.

Half of the LHINs were told improvements could be made in 13 out of 15 areas. Timely access to appropriate rehabilitation services for stroke patients is the area most in need of attention. Despite the tough marks, Ontario is a leader in the delivery of stroke care and provides services unavailable some of the other provinces, including widespread access to hospital-based stroke units and Telestroke.

The report cards indicate that the public is partly responsible for areas of poor performance. Two-thirds of people who have strokes fail to recognize the symptoms and don't get to hospital in time to receive the best possible treatment, including access to an effective clot-dissolving medication that must be administered within the first few hours of symptom onset.

Developed by the Ontario Stroke Network and Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences, the report cards evaluate stroke care at the province's 14 LHINs building on standards set out in the *Canadian Best Practice Recommendations for Stroke Care* (www.strokebestpractices.ca). The best practices were developed by the Canadian Stroke Network and Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada.

"The report cards allow health-care managers to quickly identify and fix gaps in stroke care," says Ruth Hall, Ontario Stroke Network evaluation specialist.

The scores weren't all bad – 11 of the 14 LHINs had exemplary performance in one to four areas. Improvements are being made in areas such as wait times for inpatient rehabilitation, access to brain scanning, use of clot-busting drugs and admission to stroke units.

"The Stroke Report Card provides meaningful system-level data to evaluate progress. It provides a platform for discussion with LHINs and informs decision-making and system improvement in a strategic way," says Beth Linkewich, Regional Director, North & East GTA Stroke Network.

“Information provided in the report cards can be used to prioritize investments, raise awareness and improve stroke care,” says Dr. Antoine Hakim, CEO and Scientific Director of the Canadian Stroke Network. “Ontario has been a national leader in improving stroke systems. This innovative approach to closing care gaps should be a model for the rest of Canada.”

Heart and Stroke Foundation spokesperson Dr. Michael Hill says the report cards reinforce the importance of public awareness campaigns on recognizing and reacting to stroke warning signs. “With a stroke, every minute counts,” says Dr. Hill. “Knowing and reacting immediately to warning signs is essential. Each minute delay in calling 9-1-1 or the local emergency number increases the odds of permanent brain damage, disability, or death.”

Stroke warning signs

Stroke is a medical emergency. Recognizing and responding immediately to any of these warning signs of stroke by calling 9-1-1 or your local emergency number can significantly improve survival and recovery.

- **Weakness** - Sudden loss of strength or sudden numbness in the face, arm or leg, even if temporary.
- **Trouble speaking** - Sudden difficulty speaking or understanding or sudden confusion, even if temporary.
- **Vision problems** - Sudden trouble with vision, even if temporary.
- **Headache** - Sudden severe and unusual headache.
- **Dizziness** - Sudden loss of balance, especially with any of the above signs.

-30-

The **Canadian Stroke Network** (canadianstrokenetwork.ca) is a national research network headquartered at the University of Ottawa. It includes scientists, clinicians and health-policy experts committed to reducing the impact of stroke.

The **Heart and Stroke Foundation** (heartandstroke.ca), a volunteer-based health charity, leads in eliminating heart disease and stroke and reducing their impact through the advancement of research and its application, the promotion of healthy living, and advocacy.

For more information and/or interviews, contact

The CSC 2011 MEDIA OFFICE (OCTOBER 3 and 4) at 613-288-9555

Cathy Campbell, Director of Communications, Canadian Stroke Network
613-562-5696 (office); 613-852-2303 (cell)

Congress information and media registration is at www.strokecongress.ca