

AR SAVES

Tele-medicine stroke assistance program

by Jennifer Victory, Arkansas Farm Bureau

Arkansas is in the process of losing its No. 1 national ranking. That's a good thing. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2007 (the latest year of available state-specific statistics), Arkansas led the nation in stroke-related deaths with a total of 1,873. The AR SAVES program and the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) are working to reduce this number. As director of the UAMS Center for Distance Health, Dr. Curtis Lowery likes to say, "Where you live shouldn't determine whether you live or die."

AR SAVES stands for Arkansas Stroke Assistance through Virtual Emergency Support. It's a UAMS-led tele-medicine program that links emergency room doctors to specially trained neurologists via live, two-way video. Presently, AR SAVES has 27 partner hospitals and will add nine more by mid-summer 2012. Doctors in these hospitals have access to stroke neurologists at UAMS, Fort Smith and Hot Springs.

"Our goal is to have every Arkansan less than 30 minutes away from stroke treatment," said Dr. Julie Hall-Barrow, director of Education for the Center for Distance Health at UAMS.

The mission of AR SAVES is three-

fold. First and foremost, AR SAVES provides every Arkansan with access to a stroke neurologist.

"With a limited number of board-certified neurologists available, most patients weren't able to benefit from the clot-dissolving drug, tissue plasminogen activator (t-PA)," said Hall-Barrow. If given within 4.5 hours of the onset of a stroke, t-PA

significantly increases the patient's chance for a full recovery. Many patients return to normal life within weeks.

Second, AR SAVES provides education to clinicians. Employees in every hospital connected with AR SAVES go through extensive training by the UAMS Center for Distance Health and earn certification from the National Institutes of Health. Once a hospital signs on to the program, it takes an average of three months to get the equipment in place and the staff trained. Each hospital has a designated nurse facilitator, who serves as the

AR SAVES liaison. There's also an IT facilitator to help with the technical aspect of the program.

Finally, AR SAVES is educating the public. Time is critical when seeking treatment for a stroke, and a well-educated public helps save lives. AR SAVES staffs health educators who travel the state providing stroke prevention information to the public,

how to recognize the signs of a stroke (www.uams.edu/saves) and the importance of seeking immediate medical treatment. AR SAVES also informs emergency medical service providers from the participating medical centers.

The Arkansas Farm Bureau Rural Health and Safety Committee recently voted its support of the AR SAVES program. Along with AR SAVES, Farm Bureau members may also participate in Stroke Detection Plus, a new addition to the Arkansas Farm Bureau member benefits program, which offers numerous screenings to promote the health of Farm Bureau members.

A stroke can strike at any age. Recognizing the symptoms and seeking immediate medical care can quickly save lives. AR SAVES is doing its part by making sure proper care is available to all Arkansans no matter where they live. ✍️



Stroke Assistance through Virtual Emergency Support