

Advancing Stroke Care

The Chicago Medical Society gets the word out **by Christine Fouts**

COOK COUNTY'S 22 Primary Stroke Centers provide prompt specialized care, but many patients and their doctors remain unaware of this life-saving community resource.

The Chicago Medical Society is getting the word out through its Mini-internship Program. While the mentoring program has traditionally educated legislators on the complexities of medical practice, its scope expanded earlier this year to include public health advocacy.

By arranging guided tours of certified primary stroke centers, the Society is showing physicians and legislators the services these facilities offer to reduce mortality, improve recovery from stroke, and prevent stroke from occurring in the future.

Recent tours brought Rep. Kimberly DuBuclet (D-26) and staff from the offices of Rep. Barbara Flynn-Currie (D-25), Sen. Kwame Raoul (D-13), and Ald. Will Burns (4th Ward) into Mercy Hospital's primary stroke center, and Rep. Kelly Burke (D-36) to Little Company of Mary Hospital. The mini-internships followed visits to both Mount Sinai Hospital and Swedish Covenant Hospital in early June.

Learning about challenges and methods unique to each center, legislators also gain insight into the needs of their constituents. Of the four primary stroke mini-internships, Mount Sinai Hospital claims the highest incidence of hemorrhagic stroke due to drug use in the community. Medication adherence and mistrust of physicians are additional issues for the hospital. Swedish Covenant Hospital reported the highest number of walk-in patients from myriad countries and cultures. On a typical day, 20 different languages come through the doors, presenting challenges around consent, cultural interpretations of stroke, and language barriers. The Swedish Covenant facility costs \$250,000 yearly to operate, and the hospital employs a telemedicine robot named Sheldon to assist staff and patients.

Mercy Hospital has seen its patient population diversify over the years; Chinese is now the third official language of its patients. The hospital's extensive outreach includes routine health checks at no cost and patient education. As a result, more people with stroke symptoms are calling EMS, which automatically takes them to a primary stroke center. Little Company maintains extensive data on services, and tour participants were able to observe the weekly stroke rounds, including patient scans and treatment recommendations for unique and difficult cases.

Leading the Mercy tour were Jeffrey Kramer, MD, chief of neurology and medical director of the



stroke program, and Helene Connolly, MD, medical director of the ED.

The Little Company team included Michael Schwartz, MD, neuroscience medical director and president-elect of the medical staff; Kent Armbruster, MD, vice president of medical affairs; Michael O'Mara, DO, emergency medicine medical director; physiatrist Mark Tracy, MD; Irving Fuld, MD, medical director of diagnostic imaging; hospitalist Sujith Sundararaj, MD; and Michael Thomas, DO; president of the medical staff.

The tours capped off with roundtable suggestions for the Chicago Medical Society's stroke awareness campaign. Little Company doctors said efforts should be local, so that people are treated for stroke close to home. Keeping families together also enhances continuity of care during rehabilitation, they said. Others suggested the Society focus on helping people understand what medicine can and cannot do to improve patient outcomes. The roundtables addressed medication access issues and medication compliance. Some hoped the Society can work with pharmacies and medical facilities to improve access to stroke-related medications for people in their communities.

More tours are planned in September at Advocate Illinois Masonic, Stroger Hospital, Trinity Hospital, St. Mary and Elizabeth Hospitals, and Holy Cross. The CMS Mini-internship will travel to as many of the Cook County stroke centers as possible, with tours continuing into 2013. **C**

Dr. Helene Connolly, director of the Emergency Department, Mercy Hospital and Medical Center, talks to the Mini-internship tour group about ED staff communication. She stands in front of two large screens showing patients currently admitted. This technology enables Mercy staff to carefully track stroke patients and so-called "door-to-needle" time, or administration of tPA.