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Media contact: Kerry O'Connor (816) 932-8646, pager (816) 440-0001

Stroke Center adds to its roster of treatment options

New clinical trials open treatment window for stroke victims

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – Stroke is the third leading cause of death and the leading cause of serious disability in the U.S. “Time equals brain” when it comes to the need for early and rapid intervention of ischemic strokes, the most common kind.

Advances in stroke care have widened the window of opportunity for acute treatment with clot-busting drugs and interventional embolectomy (clot retriever) devices that can reverse or minimize stroke’s often debilitating or lethal impacts.

This year, the Saint Luke’s Brain and Stroke Institute launched three new research protocols for acute stroke.

Two of the therapies target ischemic strokes, which are caused by blockages in the brain and account for 85 percent of strokes. Both treatments help increase blood flow to the affected area of the brain, aiding its recovery.

In the SENTIS trial, doctors insert a partially-inflated balloon into the descending aorta. This diverts blood from the lower body to the brain to increase circulation. With the ImpACT-24 study, doctors use a tiny implant in the upper palate to stimulate the ganglion, a nerve bundle at the base of the brain. This dilates blood vessels to bring more nutrients to damaged cells. Saint Luke’s is one of only five sites in the United States chosen to test the device. These methods can be used 14 to 24 hours after symptom onset, which may allow many more people access to treatment.

“We still emphasize the importance of getting to the hospital immediately after symptom onset because the best outcomes occur with early intervention,” said Marilyn Rymer, M.D., medical director Saint Luke’s Brain and Stroke Institute. “But for patients who arrive later, these trials may provide new hope.”

The MISTIE trial targets hemorrhagic stroke, or bleeding in the brain, which accounts for 15 percent of strokes. The treatment involves dripping a clot-busting drug into the clot caused by the hemorrhage to dissolve it. The treatment can be started up to 54 hours after the onset of symptoms.

“This is very encouraging because prior to this treatment, we had little to offer other than supportive care to patients who had this kind of stroke,” said neurosurgeon Paul Camarata, M.D., principal investigator for the trial.

The comprehensive stroke center at Saint Luke’s treats patients who present to the emergency department with the same level of urgency as a patient suspected of having a heart attack. The Code NEURO team is on call around the clock and focuses on moving the potential stroke patient at the proper pace to ensure precious minutes are not wasted. This coordinated, evidence-based care for ‘brain attack’ is designed to facilitate optimal outcomes and decrease lengths of stay, costs and event recurrence.

Saint Luke’s Stroke Center provides stroke intervention therapy to nearly 30 percent of patients who present with acute ischemic stroke – the national average is around 3 percent. Annually, more than 800 patients from 60 hospitals in the region are referred to Saint Luke’s Brain and Stroke Institute for treatment of stroke, transient ischemic attack, arterial venous malformations and aneurysm.

Established in 1993, the Saint Luke’s Stroke Center has developed a national reputation for excellence. Teams from across the country and around the world visit Saint Luke’s to learn about its efficient, evidence-based model of care.

Saint Luke’s Brain and Stroke Institute is a member of Saint Luke’s Health System, which consists of 11 area hospitals and many primary care practices, and provides a range of inpatient, outpatient, and home care services. Founded as a faith-based, not-for-profit organization, our mission includes a commitment to the highest levels of excellence in health care and the advancement of medical research and education. The health system is an aligned organization in which the physicians and hospitals assume responsibility for enhancing the physical, mental, and spiritual health of people in the metropolitan Kansas City area and the surrounding region.

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