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Contact Information

250 Washington Street
Boston, MA 02108-4619

Tel. (617) 624-6000
TTY (617) 624-6001

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MITT ROMNEY
Governor
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RONALD PRESTON
Secretary
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Commissioner

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Public Health
250 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02108-4619

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CONTACT:
Nicole St. Peter
(617) 624-5006

DPH Designates Primary Stroke Service Hospitals

Each minute of each day in the United States someone experiences a stroke. One third of these individuals die from a stroke or "brain attack." Stroke is the third leading cause of death and the leading cause of adult disability, and has a devastating impact on individuals and their families. In Massachusetts, 17,799 people were hospitalized with stroke symptoms and 3,557 people died as a result of a stroke in 2002. Strokes place a tremendous public health and economic burden on the Commonwealth.

In order to improve the care that acute stroke patients receive, and to increase the likelihood that they receive prompt access to definitive care, Department of Public Health Commissioner Christine C. Ferguson today announced that 33 hospitals have been designated as Primary Stroke Services.

"The department is committed to improving stroke care in Massachusetts," said Ferguson. "Our goal is to work collaboratively with Bay State hospitals to assure that every patient experiencing symptoms of acute stroke has access to a primary stroke service. Hospitals that provide a Primary Stroke Service must assure that emergency diagnostic and therapeutic services are provided by a multidisciplinary team and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to patients presenting with symptoms of acute stroke."

Clinical trials have established that thrombolytic therapy (treating patients with tissue plasminogen activator (tPA), a 'clot-busting' drug) is an effective treatment for acute ischemic stroke if administered within a three-hour window from the onset of symptom to the onset of treatment. The treatment restores blood flow through partial to complete reopening of the blocked artery.

"We applaud the Massachusetts Department of Public Health for implementing the Primary Stroke Service licensure program," said Lee Schwamm, MD, FAHA, associate director, acute stroke services, Massachusetts General Hospital and chair of the Northeast Affiliate Stroke Task Force for the American Stroke Association. "In creating this program, the Department has taken a tremendous step forward in making high-quality acute stroke care available to all of the citizens of the Commonwealth, not just those who live near a major medical center."

The time-sensitive nature of tPA therapy requires that acute stroke patients be transported to hospitals that are prepared to rapidly diagnose and treat their condition. The Primary Stroke Service regulations were developed to ensure patients receive the best possible outcomes and now are being implemented with today's announcement.

"As a stroke survivor, I know firsthand the benefits of being treated at a facility that is stroke ready," said Suzi Reynolds. "The rapid recognition, transport, and diagnosis of my stroke and treatment at a Primary Stroke Service facility enabled me to receive the latest stroke treatment, tPA, which had an incredibly positive impact on my outcome. I applaud the hospitals designated today as Primary Stroke Service and encourage all hospitals to participate in the program and work with the Department of Public Health to adopt these standards."

To assure that ambulances responding to 911 calls transport stroke victims to designated services, the Emergency Medical Service Regions have adopted point-of-entry plans that direct ambulances transporting patients with acute stroke symptoms to hospitals with designated primary stroke services. These emergency departments will have established lines of communication with EMS personnel to assure that patients are being assessed and transported to the right hospital.

Ferguson noted that, DPH has worked with many in the health care community since the summer of 2002 to improve stroke care in the Bay State through the development and implementation of Primary Stroke Service regulations.

Please see attached list of [Primary Stroke Service hospitals](#).

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