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National stroke quality improvement program passes the million mark

DALLAS, July 22, 2009—The American Heart Association’s Get With The GuidelinesSM-Stroke program reached a major milestone last week, as participating hospitals entered the one millionth stroke patient record into the program’s database.

“The American Heart Association and American Stroke Association are delighted to surpass the one million patient mark with Get With The Guidelines-Stroke,” said Lee Schwamm, M.D., volunteer chairman of the national Get With The Guidelines steering committee. “Published studies have confirmed the benefits to patients when their hospital participates in Get With The Guidelines-Stroke, and we’re eager to expand the program’s benefits to more patients nationwide. This accomplishment demonstrates the power of translating evidence-based care into user-friendly tools for healthcare providers.”

Get With The Guidelines is the American Heart Association’s in-hospital quality improvement program developed in 2000 by the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association to improve care quality and guidelines adherence in patients hospitalized with cardiovascular diseases.

Get With The Guidelines-Stroke was developed in 2003 to address in-hospital stroke care. From 2003 to 2009, participation in Get With The Guidelines-Stroke grew from 99 hospitals to more than 1,280, which represent more than 41 percent of total acute care hospitals in the country.

The program uses collaborative learning sessions, conference calls, e-mail and staff support to assist hospital teams improve acute and secondary prevention care systems. The web-based Patient Management Tool[®] (powered by Outcome Sciences, Inc. of Cambridge, Mass.) is used for data collection and decision support, on-demand reporting, communication and patient education.

According to Gregg C. Fonarow, M.D., past chair of the American Heart Association’s Get With The Guidelines steering committee, the program helps track care for individual patients and provides good reminders for healthcare providers.

“In many hospitals, medicine is conducted by memory,” said Fonarow. “Busy clinicians try to recall for each patient the appropriate evidence-based therapies, all during the chaos of the day. If they don’t remember all of this, repetitive oversights may occur.”

Get With The Guidelines-Stroke provides checklists of guidelines-based treatments for healthcare providers. These include the administration of specific medications to treat the immediate, or acute phase of the stroke, drugs to help reduce risk factors and help prevent another stroke or cardiovascular event, and patient education on necessary lifestyle modifications.

According to published research, the program is working. A study published December 15, 2008 in *Stroke: Journal of the American Heart Association* reported that Get With The Guidelines-Stroke led to unprecedented improvements in composite care quality—after five years, participating hospitals showed 90 percent improvement in adhering to guidelines. The study provides proof that participating hospitals are improving the care of hundreds of thousands of stroke/TIA patients.

In the U.S., stroke is the third leading cause of death and a leading cause of disability. Each year, about 795 000 people experience a new or recurrent stroke. Approximately 185,000 of these are recurrent strokes. There are also high rates of medical complications in stroke patients. The estimated direct and indirect costs of stroke exceed \$68.9 billion in 2009.

For more information, visit www.americanheart.org/getwiththeguidelines.

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