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HSHS St. Joseph's Hospital Highland ER partners with tele-stroke network that has aided 3,000 patients

Program brings emergency room neurology physician, that may be 100 miles away, to a stroke patient's bedside

Milestone celebrated on "National Stroke Month"

Since 2015, HSHS St. Joseph's Hospital in Highland has been a member of an emergency room tele-stroke network launched by Hospital Sisters Health System (HS) that helps save lives and reduce disabilities. The emergency service, described by doctors as having a "remote presence stroke specialist within minutes at the bedside," provides instant access to neurology physicians that may be hundreds of miles away.

Dr. Gurpreet Mander, Chief Medical Officer of HSHS St. John's Hospital, serves as the Executive Director of the Illinois Telehealth Network (ITN), which has helped expand the tele-stroke network into rural communities. Dr. Mander commented, "This month marks our network's milestone of providing advanced emergency room (ER) telemedicine care to 3,000 stroke patients. It is an honor to celebrate this milestone, and the network's expansion into underserved rural shortage areas." The celebration happens to take place during National Stroke Month."

Alison Tindall, RN, MHA, serves as Director of Business Development and Clinical Service Lines at HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital, and is an ITN board member. Alison described the tele-stroke program: "When a stroke patient arrives in the ER and a neurology specialist consult is requested, response times are an average of three minutes or less—a stellar record when minutes could count in saving a life." She added, "The remote presence neurologist examines the patient using sophisticated videoconference and other medical equipment, speaks with clinicians and family members, reviews CT scans and other tests, and supports treatment decisions with documentation in the medical record."

Julie Edwards, MBA, ITN Network Director, describes the tele-stroke program: "For the past five years, we have been using advanced telemedicine equipment to eliminate the distance between neurology specialist and ER stroke patient. This allows patients to receive the immediate critical care they need to recover from potentially life-threatening and debilitating strokes." She added, "It has been so successful that we are expanding telemedicine services to increase patient access to care for other health care needs, both ER, inpatient and outpatient."

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Minutes count in a stroke emergency. Alison explained, “Our tele-stroke network allows remote presence neurologists to evaluate patients for tPA, a clot-busting drug that can reduce death and disability from stroke. We often say, ‘time is brain,’ because minutes can be critical to saving lives and reducing disability.” Alison explained, “When appropriate, the tPA treatment must be administered within a brief window of a few hours after stroke symptoms begin.

A stroke is a "brain attack" that occurs from a sudden interruption of blood supply to the brain or when a blood vessel in the brain ruptures, leaking blood into the spaces surrounding the brain cells. According to the American Stroke Association, Stroke is the No. 5 cause of death and leading cause of disability in the United States. A faster diagnosis and treatment improves patient outcomes. Led by HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital in O'Fallon and HSHS St. John's Hospital in Springfield, 24/7 tele-stroke services are provided in 14 hospital ERs in central and southern Illinois, including HSHS St. Joseph's Hospital, Highland.

Dr. Mander added, “When stroke patients receive approved clot-busting medications within three hours of their first symptoms, they have a significantly reduced risk of experiencing permanent brain damage and long-term disability.” He added, “With provider shortages, many rural hospitals have no access to stroke specialists, so it has been our goal to increase patient access to this care in rural areas.

Advanced telemedicine technology can help avoid patient transfers, but in certain critical cases, it can help expedite emergency transfers. Julie explained, “We find that our tele-stroke care helps expedite treatment decisions, save lives, reduce disability, and also helps many patients avoid unnecessary transfers.” Alison added, “It’s gratifying to see ITN help purchase telemedicine equipment with federal grants, such as the USDA DLT and deploy pilot programs and sites with a HRSA Rural Health Network Development grant. Support like this allows our tele-stroke network to save lives and improve outcomes with lightning-fast response times, especially in rural communities.”

Dr. Mander commented, “It’s all about increasing rural access to quality care, and leveraging scarce specialist physician resources to serve rural areas.”

ITN member hospitals with 24/7 tele-stroke emergency department coverage include:

1. Boyd Memorial Hospital (Carrollton)
2. Carlinville Area Hospital (Carlinville)
3. Hillsboro Area Hospital (Hillsboro)
4. HSHS Good Shepherd Hospital (Shelbyville)
5. HSHS Holy Family Hospital (Greenville)
6. HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital (Effingham)
7. HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital (O'Fallon)
8. HSHS St. Francis Hospital (Litchfield)
9. HSHS St. John's Hospital (Springfield)
10. HSHS St. Joseph's Hospital (Breese)
11. HSHS St. Joseph's Hospital (Highland)
12. HSHS St. Mary's Hospital (Decatur)
13. Mason District Hospital (Havana)
14. Pana Community Hospital (Pana)

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HSHS St. Joseph's Hospital in Highland is part of the Southern Illinois Division of Hospital Sisters Health System, which also includes HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital in O'Fallon, HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital in Effingham, HSHS St. Joseph's Hospital in Breese and HSHS Holy Family Hospital in Greenville.

About Hospital Sisters Health System (<http://www.hshs.org/About-HSHS>)

Hospital Sisters Health System's (HSHS) mission is to reveal and embody Christ's healing love for all people through our high quality, Franciscan health care ministry. HSHS provides state-of-the-art health care to our patients and is dedicated to serving all people, especially the most vulnerable, at each of our 15 Local Systems and physician practices in Illinois (Belleville, Breese, Decatur, Effingham, Greenville, Highland, Litchfield, Shelbyville, and Springfield) and Wisconsin. HSHS is sponsored by Hospital Sisters Ministries, and Hospital Sisters of St. Francis is the founding institute. For more information about HSHS, visit www.hshs.org. For more information about Hospital Sisters of St. Francis, visit www.hospitalsisters.org.

About the Illinois Telehealth Network (www.IllinoisTelehealthNetwork.org)

ITN's mission is to help members improve patient access to healthcare in rural, underserved and disadvantaged communities through the application of telemedicine solutions. Launched in 2013 by Hospital Sisters Health System with a federal grant, today ITN is a nonprofit corporation with [26 members](#), a board, advisors, and has been supported by more than \$3.7 million in grants.