

Endovascular Thrombectomy – Improving Stroke Outcomes in Northwestern Ontario



Dr. Razmik Bebedjian, Interventional Neurologist, TBRHSC



Brian Bragnalo, stroke survivor and recipient of EVT



Dr. Graeme Marchuk, Neurosurgeon, TBRHSC

SUBMITTED BY THE NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO REGIONAL STROKE NETWORK

Endovascular thrombectomy (EVT) is a treatment for acute ischemic stroke. EVT uses a small tube, a guide wire and stent to remove large stroke-causing clots from the brain. Across Ontario, there are 11 EVT centres able to provide this life-changing stroke treatment.

Since 2017, Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre (TBRHSC) has been offering this treatment, and in 2022 the service was expanded to two providers.

Dr. Graeme Marchuk, Neurosurgeon and EVT provider states, “I’m pleased to welcome our newest provider, Interventional Neurologist Dr. Razmik Bebedjian, who has helped us to obtain 80 per cent coverage for access to EVT treatment in Northwestern Ontario.”

With the addition of a second provider, the Hospital has more than doubled the number of patients receiving EVT treatment. Brian Bragnalo received EVT treatment in October of 2022.

“I was sitting at home and I guess I wasn’t making sense,” Bragnalo recalls. “My wife immediately recognized what was happening and called 911. It was incredible how fast they got there. Everyone was incredible; it was like a miracle how quickly everything worked. I walked out of the Hospital a few days later.”

While not every stroke patient is eligible for EVT, this procedure addresses patients with the most severe type of stroke caused by a large clot (ischemic stroke). Patients are evaluated with advanced neuroimaging which includes TBRHSC’s latest technology, computed tomography perfusion (CTP). CTP is a colour coded brain imaging that supports physicians to identify brain tissue that can potentially be saved by EVT treatment. This advancement in imaging was launched in Thunder Bay in October 2021 and in Kenora, Lake of the Woods District Hospital in June 2022, and most recently in Fort Frances in June of this year at La Verendrye Hospital - Riverside Health Care. This technology supports getting the appropriate patients to EVT centres.

“As one of only 11 Hospitals in Ontario providing EVT treatment, we are fortunate to be able to offer this service for the people of Northwestern Ontario,” says Adam Vinet, Vice President, Patient Experience, Chief Nursing Executive and RVP, Regional Cancer Care.

For more information, visit www.nwostroke.ca or email nwostroke@tbh.net.

Donations towards supporting stroke care and EVT initiatives can be directed to the STROKE FUND through the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Foundation at healthsciencesfoundation.ca/donate or by calling the Donation Centre at 807-345-4673.

Walkers Give Heart, Stroke Patients Confidence Thanks to Family CARE Grant

BY GRAHAM STRONG

For those recovering from a stroke or a heart attack, one of the best medicines is getting up and walking as soon as possible. Moving around builds strength, reduces the risk of muscle loss, and in the case of stroke patients, can help reconnect pathways in the nervous system for better recovery. But many patients feel unsteady on their feet – and that lack of confidence could lead to falls and other dangerous situations.

Thanks to a Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Foundation Family CARE Grant, patients in the 2C unit at our Hospital can now move around more confidently with the purchase of 10 new walkers.

“Recently, so many more patients are using them that there is sometimes a wait, which impedes their recovery and rehabilitation,” said Matt Shonosky, Manager of the 2C Medical, Cardiology, and Regional Stroke Unit at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre. “As our population is ageing, we’re seeing many more people who require a walker or some sort of assistance after (a stroke or heart attack).”

The old “bed rest-only” philosophy of yesteryear no longer applies for most patients. Now, the focus is getting up and moving as soon as possible.

“Evidence shows that patients who stay in bed longer will have a longer recovery. But patients who get up faster actually will recover faster and more fully,” Shonosky said. “For our stroke and cardiac patients, we like to get them up within 24 hours unless there is something preventing them medically.”

Faster recovery also means shortened hospital stays before returning home or going to St. Joseph’s Care Group for rehabilitation.

Previously, staff sometimes had to hunt to find a walker. Thanks to the Family CARE Grant, these 10 walkers are now dedicated for 2C use so patients can get up and mobile faster.

Patients will be safer, too.

“We’ll see a lot of patients doing what we call ‘furniture walk’,” Shonosky said. “That can increase fall risk because a chair might give out and roll away or they lose grip on a sink or something.”

The walkers don’t just give stability; they give confidence.

“Even if the patient doesn’t need the walker for weight-bearing, just having it in their hands can give them confidence to move around on their own,” Shonosky said.

These all-purpose walkers are height-adjustable, lightweight, and can be configured with wheels, skis, or nothing at all, depending on the needs of the patient. They have a low profile which makes them great for moving around patient rooms, but they are strong and stable so patients are safer.

Shonosky said that many patients work with a physiotherapist or an occupational therapist after an event for more specialized recovery exercises. These new walkers won’t replace that specialized care, but add to it.

“Patients are more agile and more independent with the walkers. They can build endurance so that they feel comfortable doing things on their own and not relying on staff or others to do everything for them.”

Often, the best ideas for patient care needs come from the frontline staff who work with patients every day – and this is another example. Thanks to our generous donors, Family CARE Grants provide the funding needed to get these great ideas off the ground. You can help! Please donate online at www.healthsciencesfoundation.ca/donate or call our Donation Centre at 807-345-4673.



Matt Shonosky, 2C Manager, demonstrates how the 10 strong but lightweight walkers purchased with a Family CARE Grant help cardiac and stroke patients get up and mobile faster and with confidence.

Tips from TBRHSC’s Paediatric Healthy Living Program



Healthy Kids Healthy Families

When your child is thirsty, consider offering water first. Water is important for hydration, and adequate intake can promote a healthy body weight, improved brain function and reduced risk of cavities. You can add fresh or frozen fruit to make water more interesting. Some delicious combinations are pineapple/mint and orange/lime. Homemade smoothies are also a great way to add in fruits and vegetables. Blend ingredients with unsweetened dairy or non-dairy milk. Limit pop, sports drinks, sweetened milks and juice as these beverages contain high amounts of sugar. High intake of sugar sweetened beverages may contribute to increased risk of chronic diseases such as obesity and diabetes.

For more resources on healthy living or to learn more about TBRHSC’s Paediatric Healthy Living Program, visit <https://bit.ly/Paediatric-Healthy-Living-Program>.



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