NEW TYPE OF TREATMENT FOR STROKE (“ENDOVASCULAR” TREATMENT) SHOWN TO BE “SUPERIOR” IN CLINICAL TRIALS

Specialized Harlingen Neurologist says Valley fortunate to have both types of treatment for “brain attack” patients available at Valley Baptist Medical Center in Harlingen

HARLINGEN – A Harlingen “brain doctor” says that there’s a new standard of care for treating people who suffer strokes or “brain attacks.” Not only should such patients receive a clot-busting medication by I.V. in the Emergency Room, in many cases they should also receive treatment through a catheter in a hospital catheterization laboratory, according to new research results cited by Dr. Ameer Hassan.

Dr. Hassan – who is one of only two specialized “endovascular neurologists” in the Valley – said four recent clinical trials show that adding endovascular stroke treatment (through a catheter or flexible tube inserted through the patient’s blood vessels) is “superior” to the previous treatment of only treating patients through an I.V. in the Emergency Room.

“Fortunately, here in the Valley, we have the only hospital in the area south of San Antonio capable of doing endovascular stroke treatments – at Valley Baptist Medical Center in Harlingen,” said Dr. Hassan, who serves as Director of Endovascular Surgical Neuroradiology, Neurocritical Care, and Clinical Neuroscience Research at Valley Baptist.
In fact, Valley Baptist-Harlingen was the only location in a wide stretch of the United States between Minneapolis, Minnesota and California that participated in the recent “SWIFT PRIME” study that analyzed the benefits of treating stroke patients with the new endovascular method up to four and one-half hours after a patient begins to have symptoms of a stroke, Dr. Hassan added.

“This is an exciting time for the treatment of stroke – and very relevant to the Valley, since we have so many people at risk for stroke, because so many people have high blood pressure and / or diabetes -- and / or a high-cholesterol, high-fat diet,” Dr. Hassan said.

Clinical trials show that not only does adding the new type of treatment help save the lives of patients, it results in more of them becoming “functionally independent” -- by re-gaining the ability to walk, talk, dress themselves, and other tasks of daily living following a stroke, Dr. Hassan added.

Study results showing the benefits of the endovascular stroke treatment were presented recently at an International Stroke Conference in Nashville, Tennessee, where Dr. Hassan presented medical research he has been conducting on stroke treatment in the Valley.

Valley Baptist treats stroke patients in two specially-equipped “bi-plane” neurovascular angiography suites in the catheterization laboratory. Valley Baptist is also the only hospital south of San Antonio with two specially-trained endovascular neurologists – Dr. Hassan and Dr. Wondwossen Tekle -- who are able to provide 24-hour coverage for patients needing specialized treatment for stroke. As a result, Valley Baptist has been treating stroke patients who are transferred from other hospitals as far away as Corpus Christi and Rio Grande City.

Having endovascular stroke treatment available in the Valley has also expanded the time window in which stroke patients can be treated, as Dr. Hassan and Dr. Tekle can treat patients up to eight hours or more after symptoms begin. However, it is still critical for people with symptoms of stroke to call 911 immediately, as the sooner that treatment begins, the more of the patient’s brain the doctors can potentially save.

Once a stroke patient arrives at a hospital that is a primary stroke center, he or she will typically receive a CT scan, to verify that they do not have bleeding in the brain, but instead have a blockage blocking the flow of blood to the brain, Dr. Hassan said. The patient may then be given the clot-busting medication through the I.V.

“However, for this patient to receive the best care, an extra step is now needed – take the patient to the cath lab, for endovascular stroke treatment,” Dr. Hassan said. “Or if the patient is at a hospital that doesn’t have endovascular treatment, transfer him or her to a hospital like Valley Baptist that can provide this advanced treatment.”
During endovascular treatments, a stroke patient is taken to a neurovascular suite, where a specialized endovascular neurologist such as Dr. Hassan inserts a small hollow tube (catheter) into the patient’s leg and routes the tube through the blood vessels to the brain. Then the physician administers a clot-busting medication -- or inserts tiny mechanical devices, such as “retrievable stents” -- to open the blood vessel, so that blood and oxygen can once again flow to the brain.

Dr. Hassan said endovascular stroke treatment is enabling many more patients to actually be treated for stroke than was the case before. For I.V. treatment of stroke, the patient must arrive at the hospital within three to four hours after symptoms begin – and unfortunately only a tiny percentage of patients arrive within that time frame.

“The national average for stroke patients who are treated with I.V. therapy is only three percent. This means 97 percent of patients cannot be helped by I.V. treatment -- because they typically get to the hospital too late. But with endovascular stroke treatment, we are able to treat more than 25 percent of the stroke patients that come into the hospital. Of course the earlier they come in, the better their chances for recovery,” Dr. Hassan said.

Along with Dr. Hassan and Dr. Tekle, other neurologists who are serving Valley stroke patients at the Valley Baptist Brain and Spine Network include Dr. Victoria Parada, Board-Certified Vascular Neurologist and Clinical Director of Neurosciences and the Stroke Program at Valley Baptist-Harlingen; Dr. Felix Rivera; and Dr. Raza Khan. For more information about prevention and treatment for stroke, consult your physician and visit www.ValleyBaptist.net.
ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Stroke is a type of cardiovascular disease which affects the arteries leading to the brain and the arteries within the brain. A stroke occurs when a blood vessel that carries oxygen and nutrients to the brain is either blocked by a clot or bursts. When that happens, part of the brain cannot get the blood (and oxygen) it needs, and that part of the brain starts to die.

Each year in the United States, more than 795,000 people suffer a stroke. Stroke is the fourth leading cause of death in the United States – and a leading cause of disability.

It’s important for Valley residents to know the following warning signs of stroke and teach them to others – because with stroke, every second counts:

- **Sudden** numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg – especially on one side of the body
- **Sudden** confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- **Sudden** trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- **Sudden** trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- **Sudden** severe headache with no known cause

Stroke is a medical emergency – call 911 immediately if you experience symptoms. Learning to recognize the warning signs of stroke and acting quickly when they occur can mean the difference in surviving a stroke and minimizing long-term disability, or being physically and mentally devastated and dying from stroke. Help your loved ones by sharing this important information.
Dr. Ameer Hassan, right, and Dr. Wondwossen Tekle, the only two Endovascular Neurology specialists in the Valley, perform life-saving interventional stroke procedures in two “biplane neurovascular angiography” labs at Valley Baptist Medical Center in Harlingen.
Endovascular neurologists Dr. Ameer Hassan and Dr. Wondwossen treat Valley patients who have strokes or “brain attacks” in specially-equipped “bi-plane neurovascular angiography suites” at Valley Baptist Medical Center in Harlingen.
About Valley Baptist Health System

Valley Baptist Health System is an 866-bed faith-based regional health system located in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. It is focused on helping people achieve health for life through compassionate service inspired by faith.

Valley Baptist extends many of its services beyond its facilities and into local communities, offering free screenings for the community, support groups and numerous educational opportunities. For more information, visit www.ValleyBaptist.net (and www.Facebook.com/ValleyBaptistMedicalCenter).