Every 40 seconds, someone in the United States has a stroke. Columbus Community Hospital is committed to helping people who suffer a stroke achieve the best possible long-term outcomes. From emergency medical treatment to rehabilitation, CCH is the place to be.

Sometimes called a “brain attack,” a stroke occurs when a blood vessel, which brings oxygen and nutrients to the brain, becomes clogged or bursts. A person’s chances of surviving a stroke are much greater when they receive treatment quickly, so it’s important to learn the signs of stroke and act fast.

Early medical intervention is the key to getting stroke patients the best possible long-term outcomes. That’s why stroke experts from the hospital are educating community members about the signs of stroke, when they should seek treatment and what they can do to prevent stroke from happening in the first place.

From left: Dr. Scott Cameron, Sam Lozos, Jessica McGannon, Dr. Matthew Pieper, Dr. T. Scott Diesing, Dr. Mark Howerter, Kaylyn Pearson and Sue Deyke.
CCH stroke team

Samantha Lozos, BSN, RN-CEN, stroke nurse coordinator

Samantha Lozos began her career with Columbus Community Hospital in 2009. Along with being a nurse, Lozos is also the trauma program manager and has been the stroke nurse coordinator since 2017. As the stroke nurse coordinator, Lozos oversees the care and management of patients who come to the facility after having a stroke, or displaying stroke-like symptoms. She also constantly reviews policies and protocols for treating these patients to ensure the hospital is providing the most current and effective treatment.

Dr. Mark Howerter, chief medical officer

Dr. Mark Howerter was one of the founding members of the stroke team. Before the team was a defined group, Dr. Howerter provided emergency care for stroke patients at the hospital.

The stroke team’s biggest benefit is to the community,” Howerter said. “Patients who come to our hospital with an acute stroke receive an almost immediate evaluation by a neurologist with the stroke team at Nebraska Medicine. Our emergency department physicians and the neurologist work together to make decisions about the care of the patient. This ensures that the patient here receives the same level of care as they would receive at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.”

Sue Deyke, emergency room/interpreter services – director

Sue Deyke serves our community as the emergency room director. In this role, she oversees all processes for emergency medical care. She is responsible for ensuring that all training is complete, and that the team is ready at any moment to provide the best quality of care. She and Lozos work closely together to demonstrate the importance of teamwork and collaboration to the whole team.

I feel that having this stroke team provides CCH with an opportunity to review its process for stroke, and look for areas of improvement,” Deyke said. “The stroke team has identified practices to improve care for stroke patients, and offers the patient a chance for specialist consult when time is brain.”

Signs and symptoms of stroke

As soon as you notice any of the common signs of stroke, it is important to get yourself or your loved one to the hospital. When it comes to stroke, time is brain.

“It’s so important to get here when those symptoms start, because the longer you wait, the more chance you have to lose certain brain functions,” said Samantha Lozos, stroke nurse coordinator at Columbus Community Hospital.

The most common signs of stroke are:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body.
- Trouble seeing out of one or both eyes, or blurred or double vision.
- Confusion or trouble speaking or understanding.
- Sudden loss of balance or coordination, or trouble walking or dizziness.
- A severe headache of unknown cause.

When to seek help

Even if these symptoms last only a few minutes, Lozos encourages you not to ignore them. Instead, you should call 911 or head to the nearest emergency department immediately.

“If you have any kind of neurological deficit, whether that’s tingling or loss of sensation in one hand, one-sided extremity weakness, or you think that your speech is a little garbled, you need to come to the ER,” she said. “Don’t wait to see if it will go away.”

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Jessica McGannon, radiology technician
Jessica McGannon has worked at the hospital for 27 years. As a radiology technician, she plays an important role on the stroke team. Patients admitted to the hospital for stroke symptoms are immediately taken to a radiology technician for computerized tomography (CT) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans for diagnosis.

"This team benefits the hospital by providing a monthly review of all the processes for treatment of stroke patients and looking for opportunities to improve," McGannon said.

Chris Warren, EMS paramedic
Chris Warren, an emergency medical services (EMS) provider in the community, joined the stroke team about a year ago. By teaming up with the hospital, local trained EMS providers add to the benefit of the community when it comes to emergencies — especially strokes. This improves communication, which results in quicker care for those in need.

"Reviewing calls and past cases helps us to better treat the next stroke patient," Warren said. "Everything that is done can always be done better, and things that are missed can be corrected. When EMS and hospital staff work together, it ultimately benefits our patients."

Dr. Scott Cameron, adult hospitalist
Dr. Scott Cameron started his career at Columbus Community Hospital eight years ago, and has been a member of the stroke team since it originated in 2017. As an adult hospitalist, Dr. Cameron provides care for patients after they are admitted to the hospital.

"The stroke team helps ensure that our facility provides care in line with evidence-based guidelines," Cameron said. "We do review cases and try to identify areas of improvement."

Olivia Finecy, intensive care unit coordinator
Olivia Finecy is a service line coordinator in the hospital’s intensive care unit (ICU), and a member of the stroke team for more than four years. As the hospital’s inpatient care representative, she works closely with Sam Lozos, stroke nurse coordinator, to ensure the hospital is reaching and maintaining its benchmarks for stroke care.

Dr. Matthew Pieper, radiologist
Dr. Matthew Pieper has been practicing radiology at Columbus Community Hospital since 2018, and has been a member of the stroke team for the entirety of his career here. As the team’s radiologist, Pieper reads scans taken after a stroke patient has been admitted, and collaborates with the rest of the team to provide a diagnosis and care plan.
The hospital recently received the American Heart Association's Get With The Guidelines®-Stroke SilverPlus quality achievement award for ensuring stroke patients receive the most appropriate treatment according to nationally recognized, research-based guidelines.

"Columbus Community Hospital is committed to improving patient care by adhering to the latest treatment guidelines," said Mike Hansen, president and CEO of Columbus Community Hospital. "Get With The Guidelines makes it easier for our teams to put proven knowledge and guidelines to work on a daily basis, which studies show can help patients recover better. The end goal is to ensure more people in Columbus can experience longer, healthier lives."

Each year, program participants qualify for the award by demonstrating how their organization has committed to providing quality care for stroke patients. In addition to following treatment guidelines, Get With The Guidelines participants also educate patients to help them manage their health and recovery at home.

Services provided

Patients who come to the hospital with stroke symptoms receive a neurology consultation within three minutes of arriving, thanks to the hospital's telestroke program. This program allows CCH's emergency medicine physicians to immediately connect with expert Nebraska Medicine Telestroke neurologists through advanced videoconferencing technology. The neurologist can then view patients' CT images in real time to determine if they are stroke treatment candidates.

"When you come into our ER with a stroke, we have a whole stroke team that meets you at the bedside to make sure we are working as quickly as possible to have the best outcome for you," Lozos said.

The hospital also has 24-hour CT and MRI capabilities and lab services available 24 hours a day, as well as respiratory therapists who respond to all the hospital's stroke cases.

Following a stroke, the hospital's team of physical, occupational and speech therapists can help patients through their recovery. Stroke support groups are also available.

Awards

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CCH also received the American Heart Association’s StrokeSM Elite Honor Roll award. To qualify for this recognition, hospitals must meet specific criteria that reduce the time between an eligible patient’s arrival at the hospital and treatment with the clot-buster alteplase.

“These awards recognize the performance improvement work done by the interdisciplinary team at CCH,” said Sue Deyke, the hospital’s emergency room director. “It shows our dedication to improving stroke care in our community.”

Additionally, CCH received the American Heart Association’s Target: Type 2 Honor Roll award. This award aims to ensure that patients with Type 2 diabetes receive the most up-to-date, evidence-based care when hospitalized because of stroke.
There are many reasons a person may have a stroke. These graphs show the main causes for stroke in our community during 2022.

### Risk factors for stroke

#### Non-modifiable risk factors:

**AGE**
- 18-45: 52.8%
- 46-65: 29.2%
- 66-85: 2.8%
- >85: 2.8%

**ETHNICITY**
- White: 95.8%
- Hispanic: 1.4%
- Black or African American: 2.8%
- Unable to determine: 2.8%

**GENDER**
- Male: 34.7%
- Female: 65.3%

### TOP 10 STROKE RISK FACTORS

1. Hypertension
2. Dyslipidemia (the imbalance of lipids such as cholesterol)
3. Diabetes
4. Coronary artery disease (CAD)
5. Obesity
6. Atrial fibrillation
7. Previous smoker
8. Previous transient ischemic attack (TIA)
9. Smoker
10. Depression
See what one of our patients had to say about the care they received.

Don Rullo moved to Columbus 41 years ago after retiring from the United States Air Force. The Boston, Massachusetts, native suffered from a stroke and was rushed to Columbus Community Hospital.

The stroke team had received the call ahead and was ready for action. Team members stabilized Rullo and prepared him for air transport to Omaha, Nebraska, for further care.

“I was sitting on the couch,” Rullo said. “I got off the couch, and boom. It knocked me right to the ground. It was so sudden, but I was surprised after the fact at how well the team worked to get me where I needed to go.”

Rullo, 86, said the care he received from the stroke team was second to none. He is feeling much better and says he feels blessed to have been so close to such a great team.

Priority Medical Transport

Columbus Community Hospital has established a partnership for medical ground transportation with Priority Medical Transport, a Nebraska-based company.

Priority Medical first opened in 2015 in North Platte with two advanced life support ambulances. It now operates in Nebraska and northern Kansas. The operation has expanded to add bases in Kearney, Hastings, Lexington, McCook and Columbus.

Priority Medical operates multiple advanced life support and basic life support ambulances 24 hours a day. It offers high-quality basic and advanced life support, and critical care medical transport services.

Some of the services include advanced airway management, trauma management, Bi-PAP/CPAP, pain and sedation management, ventilator management, obstetrical transports, fetal heart tone monitoring, chest tube management, 12-lead EKG/STEMI management, IV medication administration, blood product administration, titration of IV infusion and bariatric patient transportation.

Columbus Community Hospital became an air ambulance base for Air Methods LifeNet in 2021. Air Methods is the nation’s largest air transportation service, with more than 300 bases across the country.

The base serves residents of Columbus, Fremont, Albion, Central City, Schuyler, David City, Aurora and other surrounding communities.

CCH can now have an air ambulance helicopter stationed at the hospital, eliminating the need to bring an air ambulance from the airport when the hospital needs to transfer patients to another medical facility.

The air ambulance base is staffed by a 12-member crew, including pilots, flight nurses, flight paramedics and mechanics.

They transport patients facing life-threatening illnesses or injuries, such as multiple traumas, spinal cord injuries, high-risk pregnancies, heart attacks, strokes, burns, organ transplants/procurements and limb reattachments/amputations.

The hospital is proud to be the base of LifeNet, and to have direct access to quicker care for the community.

Contact information

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