

UNM Builds Stroke-Help Network

albuquerquejournal.com

Albuquerque Journal

August 26, 2008

BY Oliver Uyttebrouck

JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Time is critical when a stroke patient turns up at a hospital emergency room.

A brain starved of blood begins to die within minutes. Aggressive treatments can save lives but diagnosis is tricky, particularly at small hospitals that lack neurological specialists.

A solution, University of New Mexico physicians say, is to build a statewide network led by a team of stroke specialists available around the clock to help emergency room physicians choose appropriate treatments.

UNM last month hired a stroke neurologist, Dr. Mare Malkoff, to direct its 24-bed neurosciences intensive care unit. He will also lead UNM's effort to earn accreditation as a primary stroke center of excellence.

Earning accreditation as a primary stroke center is "the start of getting a statewide network for stroke treatment," Malkoff said Thursday.



MALKOFF



YONAS

A stroke is a sudden attack that cuts off the flow of blood and oxygen to a portion of the brain. Stroke was the fifth-leading cause of death in New Mexico in 2005, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Dr. Howard Yonas, chairman of UNM's Department of Neurosurgery, predicted UNMH will receive accreditation as a primary stroke center within a year. UNMH satisfied "a big piece of the puzzle" by hiring Malkoff, who previously directed neurocritical care at Barrow Neurological Institute of Phoenix.

To receive certification as a primary stroke center, a hospital must show it has the resources and expertise to to diagnose and treat stroke patients. A hospital accreditation group, the Joint Commission, established certification

guidelines for primary stroke centers in 2004 to improve outcomes for stroke patients.

A statewide network for stroke treatments also calls for a telemedicine system that would allow UNMH neurologists to diagnose and recommend treatment for patients at other hospitals.

In November, the state hired **New Mexico Software, Inc.** to design a statewide "teleradiology" system that will allow hospitals to share high-resolution X-rays and CT scans, said Kevin McFarlane, statewide coordinator for the state Department of Health.

Eight hospitals so far have joined the network, MacFarlane said.

Ultimately, the state wants to extend the network to all 43-acute-care hospitals, he said.

Lawmakers last year appropriated \$100,000 to create the network.in the company.