

27 February 2012

Consultant urges people to 'Act FAST'

AN RUH consultant has called for everyone to make themselves aware of the signs and symptoms of stroke – and potentially save someone's life.

Dr Louise Shaw, a Consultant Stroke Physician, says people are still waiting too long after the symptoms of a stroke start before coming to hospital.

Her comments come as a TV advertising campaign relaunches today to promote the FAST test, a simple assessment which anyone can carry out to recognise if somebody is having a stroke.

FAST stands for Facial weakness, Arm weakness, Speech problems, Time to call 999 and encourages people to immediately call for help if they identify any one of the three symptoms in either themselves or others.

After the last FAST campaign in 2009, around 30% of patients with symptoms of a stroke waited more than an hour before calling for help and attending the RUH, but this number has since risen to 55% of patients.

Dr Shaw says: "We noticed a marked increase in people coming to hospital sooner after the onset of symptoms following the last campaign, but this has since dropped off and we feel people are again waiting much too long before coming to hospital.

"With strokes, every second counts and the longer you leave it before coming to hospital the less chance that clot-busting drugs (thrombolysis) can be given. These drugs can be very effective but there is only a short window within which they can be given.

"We've made tremendous achievements in the quality of our stroke care in recent years, but we need people to help us to help them by coming to hospital as soon as they possibly can after they have suffered a stroke to maximise their chances of making a good recovery.

"Being aware of the signs and symptoms can make the difference between somebody who has suffered a stroke making a good or full recovery, or being severely incapacitated."

A recent hospital guide produced by health analysts Dr Foster gave the RUH the best results for patient outcome following a stroke in the country. The RUH was one of only 11 hospitals cited in the Guide for having better than expected outcomes for stroke patients and, of these 11, only the RUH scored better than expected in three of the five measures against which hospitals are assessed.

Notes to Editors

The FAST test

The FAST test is a simple assessment of three specific symptoms of stroke which anyone can carry out:

Facial weakness - can the person smile? Has their mouth or eye drooped?

Arm weakness - can the person raise both arms?

Speech problems - can the person speak clearly and understand what you say?

Time to call 999