

For immediate release – World Stroke Day – October 26, 2006

AUSTRALIA LAGS BEHIND EUROPE IN STROKE TREATMENT

New research shows that Australia is lagging behind Europe in access to stroke treatment.

A report published in the *Internal Medicine Journal* found that 19 per cent of acute public hospitals in Australia provided access to a dedicated stroke care unit in 2004.

In Sweden the figure is 70 percent. It's 60 per cent in Norway, 36 per cent in Britain and 30 per cent in Germany.

Stroke is Australia's second biggest killer and a leading cause of disability.

Dr Erin Lalor, CEO of the National Stroke Foundation, said today that stroke units provide the best treatment for acute stroke. Specialised stroke unit care is provided in hospitals by doctors, nurses and rehabilitation clinicians, such as physiotherapists, in a coordinated and focused way, much like a coronary care unit.

"Only one in four patients can get stroke unit care in Australia, but we could avoid around 1,600 instances of death and severe disability a year if more patients were treated in stroke units."

To mark World Stroke Day (October 26), the National Stroke Foundation is listing Australian public hospitals that have stroke care units on its website – www.strokefoundation.com.au.

"Australians suffer a stroke every ten minutes – that's 53,000 new and recurrent strokes a year," Dr Lalor said.

Without action the number of strokes in Australia will rise to 74,000 a year by 2017.

"The World Stroke Day message is that stroke is a treatable and preventable catastrophe and that is certainly true for Australia."

Around the world the number of strokes will double in the next 15 to 20 years. World Stroke Day spokesman, Dr. Vladimir Hachinski said that by applying what is already known this figure could be halved.

"Stroke affects approximately 17 million people globally. While World Stroke Day dedicates only one day of awareness to the problem once a year, the fight against stroke is a daily struggle that must be won," Dr Hachinski said.

Anyone seeing the signs of stroke in themselves or someone else should get immediate medical attention even if the signs only last for a short period.

The signs of stroke may occur alone or together and include:

- Weakness, numbness or paralysis in the face, arm or legs
- Difficulty speaking or understanding
- Dizziness, loss of balance or unexplained fall
- Loss of vision, sudden blurred or decreased vision in one or both eyes
- Headache – usually severe and abrupt or a change in the pattern of headaches
- Difficulty swallowing

To interview Dr Lalor or for more information contact: Nicola Edwards (03) 9670 1000, or 0416 800 790.