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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

EXCELA HEALTH HOSPITALS DESIGNATED PRIMARY STROKE CENTERS

GREENSBURG, PA, May 10, 2016… Excela Health’s three acute care hospitals – Frick, Latrobe and Westmoreland – each have been designated Primary Stroke Centers by The Joint Commission, and recognized by the Pennsylvania Department of Health for exceeding national standards for quality patient care.

The accreditation comes during May, which annually is designated Stroke Awareness Month, and renewable every two years.

Act 54 of 2012 created a method of identifying Pennsylvania’s acute care hospitals as Primary Stroke Centers. Since that time, only half of the Commonwealth’s 180 hospitals have achieved certification. State protocols for providers of emergency medical services require transport of a person exhibiting stroke or stroke like symptoms such as weakness, dizziness, or feeling faint which could represent more atypical stroke findings to the closest Primary Stroke Center, making it imperative that hospitals pursue certification to assure patients receive expert care in that critical time when early medical intervention will do the most good.

To earn accreditation as a Primary Stroke Center, Excela Health hospitals have demonstrated proficiency in the prevention and early management of stroke and transient ischemic attack (TIA) symptoms based on guidelines established by The American Heart Association/American Stroke Association (AHA/ASA) for health care professionals.
For nearly 20 years, Excela Health hospitals have been stressing early recognition and treatment for both heart attack and stroke as part of a community-wide Golden Hour education initiative, which promotes recognition of signs and symptoms of heart attack and stroke and the importance of seeking medical care within the “Golden Hour” window of time when there is the greatest opportunity for a good outcome.

Over that same time period Excela hospitals have earned various honors from AHA/ASA for providing perfect patient care based on those guidelines.

“We are proud that the message of the Golden Hour is reaching our community and saving lives, and that the interventions provided by our first responders and our hospital-based care teams are effective,” said Carol Fox, MD, Excela Health’s Chief Medical Officer. “This new recognition by The Joint Commission says we have achieved the gold standard for stroke care. This certification will only serve to strengthen community confidence in the quality and safety of care, treatment and services available at Excela Health.”

FACTS ABOUT STROKE

Stroke is the fifth leading cause of death in the United States, killing approximately 130,000 people each year. It is also a leading cause of serious, long-term adult disability. It can happen to anyone at any time, regardless of race, sex or age. Interestingly, more women than men have a stroke, but men’s strokes occur at a younger age. Two million brain cells die every minute during stroke, increasing the risk of permanent brain damage, disability or death. Recognizing the signs and symptoms and acting FAST to get medical attention can save a life and limit disabilities.

Common stroke symptoms include:

- 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.
To recognize and respond to stroke symptoms, use the FAST test:

- **F = FACE**  Ask the person to smile.  Does one side of the face droop?
- **A = ARMS**  Ask the person to raise both arms.  Does one arm drift downward?
- **S = SPEECH**  Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence.  Is the speech slurred?
- **T = TIME**  Call 9-1-1 if you observe these signs.  Time is brain!

Everyone has some stroke risk.  Stroke risk can be controlled easier than one may think.  With the help of a doctor, many diseases that increase risk, such as high blood pressure, atrial fibrillation, high cholesterol, diabetes and atherosclerosis can be treated.  Lifestyle risk factors, such as unhealthy eating, tobacco/ alcohol use, exercise and obesity can be changed.

Medical stroke risk factors and prevention guidelines include:

1. **Know your blood pressure.**  High blood pressure is the leading cause of stroke.  If it is elevated, work with your doctor to get it under control.
2. **Find out if you have atrial fibrillation.**  A-fib can cause blood to collect in the chambers of your heart.  This blood can form clots and cause a stroke.
3. **Know your cholesterol number.**  High cholesterol can indirectly increase stroke risk by putting you at greater risk for heart disease – an important stroke risk factor.  If it is high, work with your doctor and registered dietitian to control it.
4. **Control your diabetes.**  Follow your doctor’s recommendations for dietary changes, lifestyle modifications and medicine regimen carefully because diabetes puts you at an increased risk for stroke.