

Calgary stroke support programs help navigate life after stroke

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It takes one to know one, especially when it comes to stroke recovery, according to two new Calgary programs providing support and resources to 1,200 stroke patients.

The In-Patient Support Program in Recovery from [Stroke](#) (I.N.S.P.I.R.E.S) is a peer-to-peer support program connecting people affected by stroke with patients in hospital following their stroke. The newly launched Patient and Family Passport for Stroke is a resource that contains everything [stroke patients](#) and their families need to know about stroke.

Lori Beaver, a woman who is no [stranger](#) to stroke, is behind both of the programs. She had a massive stroke eight years ago that left her in hospital for four months. After years of recovery, Beaver wanted to become more involved in the stroke community.

In April 2011, Beaver created the I.N.S.P.I.R.E.S. program with the help of her [neurologist](#) Dr. Michael Hill, clinical nurse educator Carole Neufeldt, administrative coordinator Lindsay Litowsky, and others.

"Stroke is very frightening," said Beaver, "I wanted to be there to offer some guidance and hope to the stroke patients."

Now in its second year, the program has recruited and trained 12 volunteers who visit in-hospital stroke patients on a weekly basis.

"It gives the patients a sense of relief," said Beaver. "We answer all sorts of questions related to our experiences after stroke—such as [fatigue](#) and [paralysis](#), changes at home, and getting back to work.."

By the end of this year, Beaver says the I.N.S.P.I.R.E.S. program will grow to have 16 fully trained volunteers.

This year Beaver also helped launch the Patient and Family Passport for Stroke. The patient passports are full of the stroke resources Beaver wished she had been given when she had a stroke.

The binders include:

- hospital and unit information (including key aspects of care, treatment, routines and what to expect from the different care providers they will meet)
- stroke resources (the Canadian Stroke Network's Getting On With the Rest of Your Life After Stroke and the Patient and Family Guide to Stroke Best Practices)
- tips for healthy living and nutrition
- community stroke resources, including contact information for stroke support groups and rehabilitation centres.

In its first month, 74 per cent of stroke patients who received a patient passport found the tool was highly effective. A patient experience survey also found that patients found resource helpful and easy to read.

Patient passports serve as a guide to help deliver stroke best practices, says Michael Suddes, manager for the Calgary Stroke Program.

"The passports aren't just a patient resource. They set expectations on what staff need to be doing throughout a patient's stay in hospital," says

Suddes. "It teaches patients about standards of care."

There are also plans, with the other stroke centres across Alberta, to adopt a similar approach province-wide.

"It is important for stroke patients to receive all the information and support they need when they first arrive in hospital and that they also have tools for when they return home," says Dr. Mark Bayley, Co-Chair of the Canadian Stroke Congress.

"Such innovative programs are a guiding light in how to support stroke patients and give them the information they need," says Ian Joiner, director of stroke for the Heart and Stroke Foundation. "Right now there is an uneven availability of similar programs across the country. We can learn from this successful model. "

The Canadian Stroke Congress is co-hosted by the Canadian Stroke Network, the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the Canadian Stroke Consortium.

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