



Lorna Edwards with daughter Robyn, who called 999 when her mother collapsed at home last November. She could have died without the new treatment

# New treatment reverses crippling strokes

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A TREATMENT that can reverse the devastating effects of a stroke is set to be introduced across England.

A draft NHS England policy on the treatment – known as mechanical thrombectomy – recommends it is rolled out to specialist centres across the country and made available round the clock. The treatment is currently available in only a small number of units, mostly during working hours.

Doctors say the treatment brings patients “back to life” who would otherwise have died or been left paralysed.

Sanjeev Nayak, a consultant neuroradiologist, who has pioneered the treatment at the University Hospital of North Midlands NHS Trust, said: “This is one

of the top 10 medical innovations of the last decade.”

The policy overhaul comes after The Sunday Times revealed last year that only about 500 stroke victims a year are given the procedure. NHS England estimates that 9,000 patients could potentially benefit from it.

About 152,000 patients a year suffer from strokes, with about 80% caused by blood clots and 20% caused by bleeding in the brain.

Under the treatment, a small tube is inserted into an artery in the groin and manoeuvred towards the brain. The clot is then sucked into the tube or pulled out with a small wire.

The treatment benefits those with the most severe blood clots, which cannot always be successfully broken

down by drugs. These patients will be among those with the worst outcomes – often requiring long-term care for significant paralysis – but the new treatment can reverse the effects of a stroke.

Lorna Edwards, 44, a medical secretary from Wolverhampton, suffered a stroke last November. She was at home with her daughter Robyn when her leg went numb and she collapsed to the floor.

She said: “My speech was slurred. I sounded drunk. I just couldn’t move. My daughter said, ‘Do you think you’re having a stroke?’ She dialled 999.”

Edwards was taken to Royal Stoke University Hospital, where Nayak and his team performed mechanical thrombectomy.

Edwards said: “If Stoke had been further away or the timing had not been right, I would not be here now – or completely paralysed.”

Strokes are estimated to cost the NHS about £3bn a year and Nayak said the treatment would save it millions of pounds because patients who would otherwise face a long rehabilitation programme or a life of severe disability could walk out of hospital.

Trials have shown that the proportion of people who can function independently 90 days after a stroke increases by between 19% and 35% following mechanical thrombectomy.

Kyriakos Lobotesis, a consultant neuroradiologist at Charing Cross Hospital in west London, which offers the procedure, said it was

vital that patients were treated within six hours of a stroke and the challenge in rolling out a national 24-hour service would be getting patients to the centres in time and ensuring there were sufficient staff.

NHS England said the evidence for mechanical thrombectomy was “very strong”.

Professor Tony Rudd, national clinical director for stroke at NHS England, said: “NHS stroke care and stroke survival are now at record levels. We recognise the potential effectiveness mechanical thrombectomy could have for about 10% of stroke patients and are drawing up a policy for its possible use across the NHS.”

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