

Stroke rehabilitation trial at West Gippsland Hospital

West Gippsland Hospital was recently selected as the only rural hospital in Australia to participate in a national stroke rehabilitation trial.

The trial is an initiative of the National Stroke Research Institute in Melbourne and involves a series of randomised controlled trial tests.

The hospital has commenced recruiting patients to participate in the trial which assesses whether commencing rehabilitation very early after stroke results in fewer deaths and less disability than current stroke management practices and care.

Physiotherapist and trial director Julie Bernhardt said the enthusiastic support provided by the hospital's stroke team has been outstanding.

Nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, medical staff and management have worked very hard to support this research, she said.

"The WGH stroke

team are making a valuable contribution to a world class research project as well as provid-

ing stroke patients from regional areas with an opportunity to participate in rehabilitation

research."

The hospital's stroke trial co-ordinator and clinical nurse specialist



Surrounding stroke patient Molly Hewitt are (standing) her husband Edwin and stroke rehabilitation trial team members medical ward clinical nurse manager Bernie McKenna, physiotherapy manager Richard Adams, medical ward nurse Casey Banks, NSRI trial investigator Fiona Ellery, blind assessor Kandi Burke and (seated) WGH trial co-ordinator Susan Smith and medical ward nurse Sarah Hewat.

Susan Smith said stroke patients already begin rehabilitation early, however this new rehabilitation protocol starts within 24 hours of stroke and is a co-ordinated nurse and physiotherapy program.

Stroke survivor Brooke Parsons who is participating in the trial, said, "To see staff from different disciplines working together to find better ways to treat stroke is exceptional and exciting."

The five year trial will involve more than 10 Australian hospitals, with over 2000 stroke patients recruited in the next four years.

The trial has already begun at the Austin and Royal Melbourne Hospitals and in major hospitals in other States. Financial support has been received from the National Heart Foundation and funding of \$2.8m from the National Health and Medical Research Council.

Anyone wanting more information about the trial can contact Susan Smith at West Gippsland Hospital on 3623 0732 or go to www.nrsi.org.au