

To the Editor:

The call for an acute stroke unit at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital is timely, and comes from strong evidence that outcomes for patients treated in acute stroke units are better. Patients treated in these units are more likely to live and function independently following discharge.

About 300 Islanders will experience a stroke this year, and of those who survive, 75 per cent will be left with a physical or mental deficit that will limit their ability to live independently and return to the activities that they once enjoyed.

Islanders have significant risk factors for stroke and as a population we are nearing a day when seniors will comprise the largest percentage of our population. This could spell disaster for our health care system and for our society as a whole unless we commit now to providing the infrastructure to deal with this looming health situation.

It is gratifying to recognize that elements of the PEI Integrated Stroke Strategy, launched in 2006, are already making an important difference. At our two acute care hospitals, we now have t-PA, a drug that can dissolve clots that cause strokes. Those of us who assisted in the development of the strategy are proud of that milestone. However, it is time to move on to another key area - the implementation of an acute stroke unit for PEI.

I know from personal experience in my own family that stroke is a terrible and unrelenting disease. It is a brain attack which strikes suddenly and unexpectedly, and can impair our ability to talk, walk, understand, and think. Stroke can destroy relationships, and can rob us of our most productive years. As a nurse with 33 years experience, I have seen the ravages of stroke firsthand and I am absolutely convinced that organized stroke care is essential to us here on PEI.

The good news is that we have the research and knowledge available now to prevent and/or reduce the enormous suffering caused by stroke within our population. We also have more effective strategies to enable stroke survivors to be reintegrated into their lives and their communities.

Evidence supports the importance of an acute stroke unit as a crucial part of our Stroke Strategy. What we need now is the political will and the determination to make it happen. Islanders need and deserve nothing less.

Sincerely,

Barb Campbell, RN, PhD