12 September 2016

**Enriched environments improve outcomes for stroke patients**

Physical activity and environmental stimulation is leading to better outcomes for Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service (SCHHS) stroke patients.

SCHHS Physiotherapist Ingrid Rosbergen led a study into the benefits of an ‘enriched environment’ within the acute stroke unit at Nambour General Hospital. The research is being highlighted as part of National Stroke Week (12 to 18 September).

“The idea of creating an enriched environment is to provide stimulation for stroke patients, where there is access to physical, social and cognitive activity while they recover,” Ms Rosbergen said.

Extensive studies have been carried out using rodents recovering from a stroke, which showed the animals’ function improved significantly when provided with a stimulating environment. Due to similarities between human and rodent physiologies, results from rodent studies are often applicable to humans.

Ms Rosbergen and her team tailored these results to suit a clinical setting; and instead of patients spending the majority of their time alone in their room lying down, the ward was modified to encourage stimulation and interaction.

“We changed meal times for patients, starting with communal breakfast and lunch times on weekdays and started daily group activities, to encourage more interaction with others.

“We also implemented stimulating materials such as books, newspaper, magazines, puzzles and iPads with apps and music as well as a Nintendo Wii fit to encourage physical and cognitive activity for patients,” Ms Rosbergen said.

We encouraged patients and families to also use these materials outside of therapy hours to increase patient activity.

The result of the pilot study has shown that patients in the enriched environment are more active, with physical activity increasing from 2.4 active hours a day to 3.6 hours.

“Social and cognitive activity also significantly increased for the patient. The enriched environment within the acute stroke unit also reduced the amount of time patients spent in bed during the waking hours from 7.5 hours to five hours.”

“The study showed that patients needed a shorter stay in the acute hospital, and fewer patients suffered secondary complications following a stroke. Their mood was also lifted within the enriched environment.”
The SCHHS stroke team has identified the need to improve stroke unit care in Australia, as the ageing population increases. Stroke is the primary health condition causing long lasting disability in adults.

The team plans to increase the size of the study, and implement an enriched environment in the new acute stroke unit at the Sunshine Coast University Hospital.

Media are invited to visit the acute stroke unit and interview staff and patients inside their newly ‘enriched environment’.

When: Tuesday 13 September, 12pm.
Where: Nambour General Hospital main reception.

ENDS

Media contact: Alexia Kelly | 5470 5833

Follow us!