What is a stroke?

A stroke is a serious medical condition that occurs when there is either a blockage in one of the blood vessels in the brain due to a clot, or a bleed caused by a burst blood vessel.

Like all organs, the brain needs the oxygen and nutrients provided by blood to function properly. If the supply of blood is restricted or stopped, brain cells begin to die. This can lead to brain damage and possibly death.

Strokes are a medical emergency and prompt treatment is essential. The sooner a person receives treatment for a stroke, the less damage is likely to happen.

Strokes affect people in different ways depending on which part of the brain has been affected; this makes it difficult to be certain about how much recovery is possible.

What are the types of stroke?

There are two main causes of strokes:

- Ischaemic (more than 80% of all cases): the blood supply is stopped due to a blood clot
- Haemorrhagic: a weak blood vessel supplying the brain bursts and causes brain damage

What is thrombolysis?

Ischaemic strokes can sometimes be treated using a 'clot-busting' medicine called alteplase, which dissolves blood clots (thrombolysis).

Alteplase is known to be effective if started during the first four and a half hours after the onset of the stroke. Even within this narrow time
frame, the quicker alteplase can be started the better the chance of recovery. However, not all patients are suitable for thrombolysis treatment.

Before we decide if thrombolysis is the best treatment for you, it is necessary to have a special scan called a CT scan to find out what has caused your stroke.

People who have had a stroke caused by a bleed in the brain cannot be treated with alteplase.

**What are the advantages and disadvantages of thrombolysis?**

**Advantages**

Thrombolysis treatment may:

- Increase life expectancy
- Reduce long term disability

**Disadvantages**

- Thrombolysis does not work for everyone
- This treatment could cause bleeding in the brain
- Bruising can occur very easily for 24 hours

**How is thrombolysis given?**

You will need a cannula (needle) in your arm; this is not usually painful. Alteplase is given straight into a vein through this cannula. It takes about one hour.
What happens following thrombolysis?

Special observations and tests will be repeated every 15 minutes at first, then every half hour, every hour, then every four hours, for 24 hours.

These observations include measuring your blood pressure, heart rate and oxygen saturation levels, as well as testing how you can move your arms and legs, talk and what you can remember.

After this time you may move to a rehabilitation ward to continue your recovery.

How long will I be in hospital?

This will depend on:

- the kind of stroke you have had
- how well you are recovering
- whether you need any rehabilitation

No two people are ever affected in the same way and recovery from stroke depends on many factors, such as where the stroke occurred in the brain, the severity of the stroke, the age of the patient and their medical history.

Are there any other options?

This is the treatment recommended by your consultant. If you wish to discuss any other options please speak to your consultant, specialist stroke nurse, doctor or ward nursing team.
Where can I get further information?

While you are in hospital you will be seen by many people. If you need further information ask any of these staff.

You will be given written information on your condition; do not be afraid to ask for more.

The Stroke Association is a useful source of information about stroke, treatment and aftercare. For further details see their website or contact them on the number below.

- www.stroke.org.uk
- 0114 268 2633