

UC San Diego Medical Center One of First Five Comprehensive Stroke Centers in the Nation

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Rigorous requirements highlight significant difference in the treatment of complex stroke cases

UC San Diego Medical Center-Hillcrest is one of the first five facilities in the country, and the only center in San Diego County, to be certified as a Comprehensive Stroke Center (CSC), the newest level of certification for advanced stroke care awarded by The Joint Commission. This certification recognizes the significant differences in resources, staff and training that are necessary for the treatment of complex stroke cases.

“This Comprehensive Stroke Center certification is vital to UC San Diego Health System’s position as a leader in the San Diego community in providing the most advanced and state-of-the-art medical and surgical care for all patients who suffer a stroke in our region,” said Paul Viviano, CEO, UC San Diego Health System. “This expert care is provided not only to patients directly admitted to UC San Diego Medical Center but also to those patients transferred from other care centers that cannot offer the comprehensive stroke level of care.”

For two days in September, a team of Joint Commission expert surveyors evaluated the Stroke Center in Hillcrest for compliance with the new comprehensive stroke center standards and requirements. Joint Commission experts reviewed UC San Diego Medical Center’s compliance with the requirements for The Joint Commission’s Comprehensive Stroke Certification program in addition to the primary stroke center requirements, such as collecting Joint Commission core measure data and using it for performance improvement activities.

“UC San Diego Medical Center offers the region’s only truly multidisciplinary stroke team. This means all stroke patients have access to the best care for their individual needs, be it surgical, medical or endovascular,” said Thomas Hemmen, MD, PhD, director of the Stroke Center at UC San Diego Health System and associate professor of medicine at UC San Diego School of Medicine. “We know that patients admitted to a facility such as ours have better outcomes and a better chance for meaningful recovery.”

"By achieving this advanced certification, UC San Diego Medical Center – Hillcrest has thoroughly demonstrated the greatest level of commitment to the care of its patients with a complex stroke condition," says Mark R. Chassin, MD, FACP, MPP, MPH, president, The Joint Commission.

"Certification is a voluntary process and The Joint Commission commends UC San Diego Medical Center – Hillcrest for successfully undertaking this challenge to elevate the standard of its care for the community it serves."

The higher standards of the CSC certification indicates that UC San Diego Medical Center can assist all stroke patients and is better prepared – with state-of-the-art equipment, infrastructure, staff and training – to diagnose and treat patients with the most complex strokes.

"The best stroke care is team based and comprehensive," said Bob Carter, MD, PhD, chief of Neurosurgery at UC San Diego Health System and professor of neurosurgery at UC San Diego School of Medicine. "This certification recognizes UC San Diego Health System's investment to provide round-the-clock availability – of stroke neurologists, neurosurgeons, neurocritical care specialists, and specially trained stroke nurses – to treat patients any hour of the day, seven days a week, every day of the year for stroke from any cause, whether a blocked artery, a ruptured aneurysm, or brain hemorrhage."^[1]^[2]

Carter also commented that UC San Diego Health System is home to many firsts in neurosurgical therapy for stroke including the use of minimally invasive endovascular neurosurgery, a program now led by Alexander Khalessi, MD, MS. "UC San Diego Health System is a national leader in the development and use of advanced neurovascular procedures including endovascular clot retrieval for stroke, treatment of brain aneurysms and arteriovenous malformations, and endoscopic brain hemorrhage removal. These technologies have helped put UC San Diego at the forefront of stroke care."

Comprehensive Stroke Center Certification was developed in collaboration with the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association and derived from the Brain Attack Coalition's "Recommendations for Comprehensive Stroke Centers," (*Stroke*, 2005), and "Metrics for Measuring Quality of Care in Comprehensive Stroke Centers," (*Stroke*, 2011), and on recommendations from a multidisciplinary advisory panel of experts in complex stroke care.

"The American Heart Association/American Stroke Association congratulates UC San Diego Medical Center – Hillcrest on its Comprehensive Stroke Center Certification," commented Mark J. Alberts, MD, FAHA, American Heart Association/American Stroke Association spokesperson and incoming vice-chair of Neurology and Neurotherapeutics at UT Southwestern Medical Center. "Comprehensive Stroke Centers offer a high level of care for patients with the most severe and challenging types of strokes and cerebrovascular disease."


Every year, over 5,000 San Diegans are brought to a local hospital via EMS with an acute and often fatal stroke. The CSC will offer these patients with arterial blood clots or brain hemorrhages

a multidisciplinary treatment approach guaranteeing the best possible outcomes in each individual case.

Nearly 1 million people in the United States were hospitalized by stroke in 2009, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. An estimated 7 million Americans have had some form of stroke, which was the fourth-leading cause of death in the United States in 2010.

The Stroke Center at UC San Diego Health System became the first primary stroke center in San Diego County recognized by The Joint Commission and has also earned the Joint Commission's Gold Seal of Approval.™


For more information about the Stroke Center at UC San Diego Health System, visit <http://health.ucsd.edu/stroke>

For more information on The Joint Commission and American Heart Association's Advanced Certification for Comprehensive Stroke Center visit www.jointcommission.org/ 

About UC San Diego Health System:

Launched in 1966, UC San Diego Health System is the region's only academic health system, with a mission of providing excellent and compassionate patient care, advancing medical discoveries and educating future health care professionals. It comprises UC San Diego Medical Center in Hillcrest, and UC San Diego Thornton Hospital, Moores Cancer Center, Shiley Eye Center, Sulpizio Cardiovascular Center and Jacobs Medical Center (slated to open in 2016) in La Jolla, as well as other primary and specialty practices of UC San Diego Medical Group. For more information, visit <http://health.ucsd.edu>

About The Joint Commission:

Founded in 1951, The Joint Commission seeks to continuously improve health care for the public, in collaboration with other stakeholders, by evaluating health care organizations and inspiring them to excel in providing safe and effective care of the highest quality and value. The Joint Commission evaluates and accredits more than 19,000 health care organizations and programs in the United States, including more than 10,300 hospitals and home care organizations, and more than 6,500 other health care organizations that provide long term care, behavioral health care, laboratory and ambulatory care services. The Joint Commission currently certifies more than 2,000 disease-specific care programs, focused on the care of patients with chronic illnesses such as stroke, joint replacement, stroke rehabilitation, heart failure and many others. The Joint Commission also provides health care staffing services certification for more than 750 staffing offices. An independent, not-for-profit organization, The Joint Commission is the nation's oldest and largest standards-setting and accrediting body in health care. Learn more about The Joint Commission at www.jointcommission.org 

About the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association:

The American Heart Association/American Stroke Association is devoted to saving people from

heart disease and stroke – America’s No. 1 and No. 3 killers. We team with millions of volunteers to fund innovative research, fight for stronger public health policies, and provide lifesaving tools and information to prevent and treat these diseases. The Dallas-based association is the nation’s oldest and largest voluntary organization dedicated to fighting heart disease and stroke. To learn more or to get involved, call 1-800-AHA-USA1, visit www.heart.org or call any of our offices around the country.

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