



Welcome to the first official NSW Rural Stroke Project Officer Newsletter. With 2006 drawing to a close, I thought it timely to provide an overview of the project's achievements to date.

As most of you are aware, the rural stroke project funded through the NSW Institute of Rural Clinical Services and Teaching, commenced in March this year. The project is for a period of 2 years, with the key aims being to:

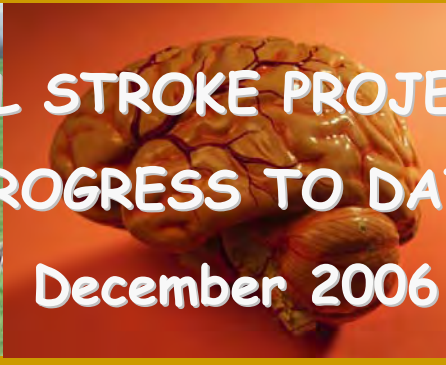
- Review stroke services across rural NSW and determine effective models of coordinated stroke services which meet the needs and challenges of rural communities.
- Convene education forums in rural NSW to foster networks and empower rural clinicians in the area of stroke management
- Support the development of clinical champions in stroke care, assume the role of key facilitator of information sharing and promote involvement in, and awareness of the latest stroke research.

The position covers all of rural NSW with the map below highlighting some of the towns the Holden Commodore has taken me to!!



★ = sites visited

# NSW RURAL STROKE PROJECT OFFICER PROGRESS TO DATE December 2006



## RURAL STROKE SERVICES

In order to identify the current status of rural stroke services together with information on potential stroke service models in rural areas, a combination of questionnaires and semi-formal focus groups were conducted. One survey targeted the rural referral hospitals, whilst the other survey aimed to highlight stroke services in the district hospitals and multipurpose centres throughout NSW. The response rate to the surveys was excellent with 100% (16) of the rural referral hospitals responding and 75% of the smaller sites (84 hospitals). Some of the preliminary results included the obvious lack of dedicated stroke services across rural NSW with only one facility indicating a coordinated stroke service model. The importance of general physicians in the care of stroke patients has been highlighted, together with neurologists, rehab physicians and geriatricians in sites where these specialists are available. Results indicated no dedicated allied health or nursing staff to stroke management and less than half of rural hospitals are currently utilising clinical pathways to assist with the management of stroke patients. Interestingly, most sites indicated having access to telehealth facilities however none are currently implementing the technology for management of stroke patients. Potential barriers and uses of this service have been highlighted in the surveys. Smaller hospitals and MPS centres identified education, pathways and protocols and the potential for telehealth as high priorities to improve stroke services. The information obtained from these surveys and interviews is currently being collated in conjunction with the National Stroke Research Institute and a report will be available in early 2007.

## Stroke support "strong"

Broken Hill already has great support services for stroke patients, but access to education about the most up-to-date treatment and interventions was always of great benefit, according to NSW Rural Stroke Project Officer, Melissa Gill.

Ms Gill was in the city this week for a stroke education forum involving all medical staff from across the region.

The forum brought together some of the State's leading specialists in stroke care including Dr Christopher Levi, the co-chairman of the Australian Stroke Unit Network and Director of Anna Stroke Services at the John Hunter Hospital in Newcastle.

"I've been a great fan," said Ms Gill. "Broken Hill has some really strong stroke services."

"They're able to be shared in a lot of other rural centres."

Forum participants were given information on a range of topics including:

- how to identify stroke cases;
- clinical management and rehabilitation medicine;
- how to provide the best care;
- and how to be better equipped with the most current knowledge at all levels to facilitate the stroke patient's journey through the health system.

Ms Gill said:

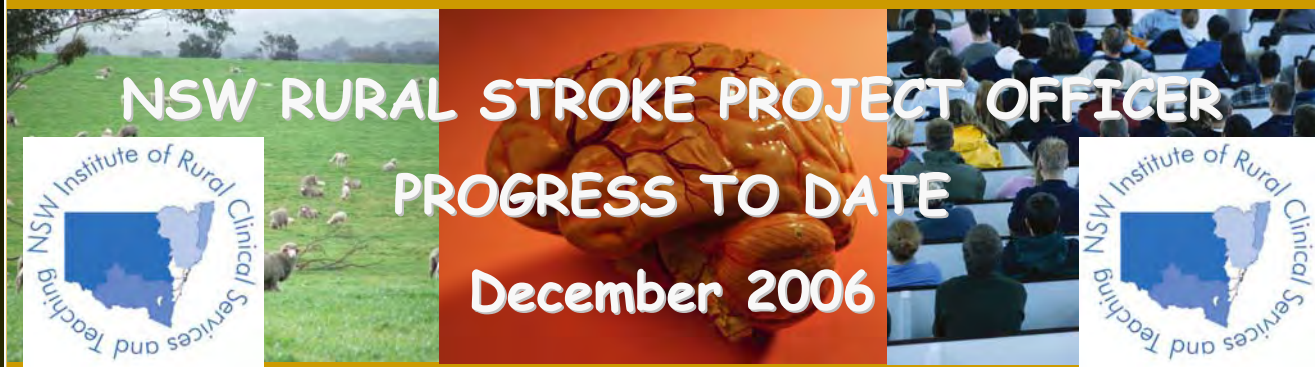
"I think it's important to be able to share with other rural sites in the people network in Broken Hill Hospital since every 12 months."

The forum was the result of 10 country stroke education forums being hosted this year by the NSW Stroke Services Network in conjunction with the Australian Stroke Unit Network. Clinical education forums are also being held through the health system.

From left: RSH Hospital Physiotherapy Manager, Margaret Farrell, and Clinical Director, Bronwyn Hill, with NSW Rural Stroke Project Officer, Melissa Gill at the stroke education forum yesterday.

## Broken Hill Stroke Forum





## EDUCATION

In conjunction with the NSW Stroke Services Network (through GMCT), the Clinical Excellence Commission and Sanofi Aventis, ten rural stroke education forums have occurred throughout NSW. Lismore, Coffs Harbour, Wagga Wagga, Broken Hill, Dubbo, Tamworth, Nowra, Cooma, Port Macquarie and Orange have been the sites for the education whereby over 700 clinicians and 150 GP's have been educated from local and metropolitan experts in stroke management. The feedback from these forums has been extremely positive with comments such as "it's so rare to receive education in your local area, with experts from metropolitan units, happy to share there knowledge all free of charge!". The education component of the project will continue in 2007 with a forum planned for each rural area health service.



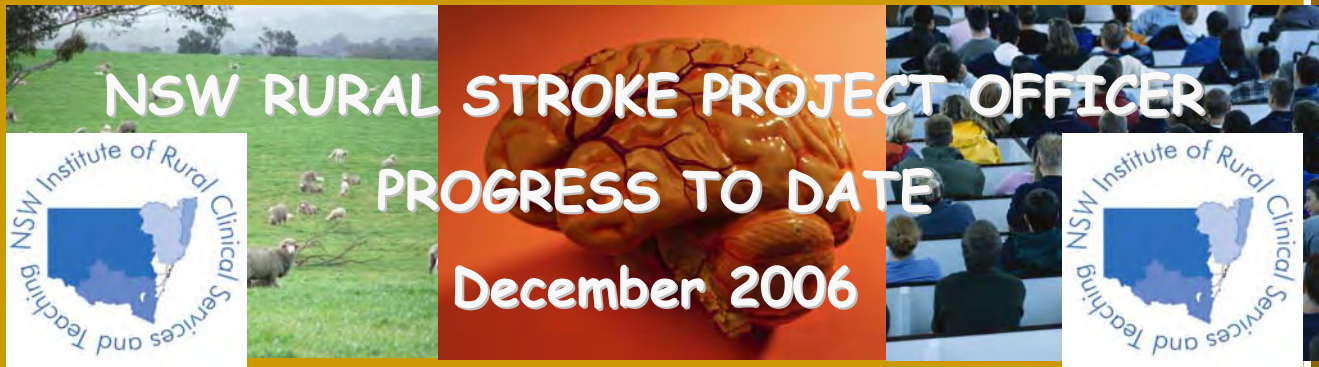
Lismore Stroke Forum



Coffs Harbour Stroke Forum

## 2007 Forum Dates

**21<sup>ST</sup> FEBRUARY – NORTH COAST AREA – BALLINA**  
**9<sup>TH</sup> MAY - HUNTER NEW ENGLAND – ARMIDALE**  
**18<sup>TH</sup> JULY – GREATER SOUTHERN AREA – GRIFFITH**  
**24<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER – GREATER WESTERN AREA – DUBBO**



## NETWORKS

A rural stroke distribution list currently lists more than 220 stroke clinicians, from various health backgrounds working in rural areas. This network which is in addition to a list of more than 640 clinicians held by Mark Longworth, State Stroke Manger, ensures stroke clinicians working in rural areas have the opportunity to be kept informed of the latest research, professional development activities, opportunities for scholarships as well as allowing them to be connecting to clinicians from dedicated stroke services to gather tools and seek advice.

## GMCT / NATIONAL STROKE RESEARCH INSTITUTE AUDIT

In addition to the questionnaires identifying stroke services, a number of rural hospitals have also completed the gruelling task of auditing 100 past patient files for people presenting to ED following a stroke. There are now 29 hospitals across NSW who have participated in the audit of the acute phase of care. This audit was developed by the National Stroke Research Institute (NSRI) in conjunction with GMCT. A comprehensive report is provided to each hospital following completion of the audit by the NSRI. Congratulations to those hospitals and dedicated staff who have survived the dungeons of the medical records departments to complete the audit!

## SCHOLARSHIP TO SSA

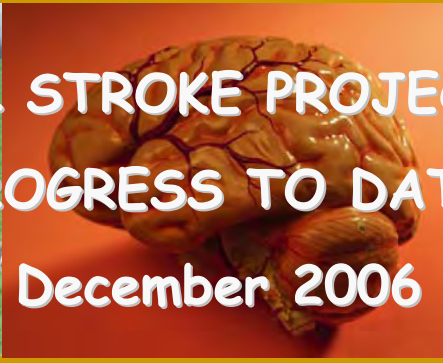
The NSW Institute of Rural Clinical Services and Teaching generously awarded a \$2000 scholarship for a rural stroke clinician to attend the Stroke Society Meeting of Australasia in Glenelg, Adelaide in October. Felicity Perrin, TASC Coordinator with Hunter New England Health was the recipient of the scholarship - Congratulations Felicity!



Dubbo Stroke Forum

## RURAL STROKE SERVICES FUNDING

It was extremely exciting, when during Stroke Week in September, the NSW Health Minister John Hatzistergos announced \$1million recurrent funding for rural stroke services in NSW. NSW Health State-wide services, is currently reviewing submissions following a call for interest in October prior to allocation of the funding.



# NSW RURAL STROKE PROJECT OFFICER

## PROGRESS TO DATE

### December 2006

#### DATES FOR THE DIARY (in addition to the rural stroke forums)

14<sup>th</sup> February 2007- Social Workers Forum – Newcastle

2/3<sup>rd</sup> August 2007 – ‘Smart Strokes’ Conference – Nursing and Allied Health Stroke Conference – Star City Casino, Sydney



After 19, 995 kilometres, regular 6:00am flights from Armidale, many nights slept in hotel rooms, four office changes in Armidale Community Health, ten rural stroke forums, 150 surveys, meeting many motivated and dedicated stroke clinicians and only one speeding fine, I would like to say to all of the rural stroke clinicians thank you for your support throughout 2006. I thoroughly look forward to working with you in 2007.

**WISHING YOU A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A GREAT 2007!**

For further information, please contact on 0428107659 or 6776 9801 or via email: [melissa.gill@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au](mailto:melissa.gill@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au)

Regards,  
Melissa