

MMC Recertified as Comprehensive Stroke Center and Now the Second Busiest in Michigan

The Witham Family Comprehensive Stroke Center prepares for a period of increased risk as winter weather and the holidays approach.

The Witham Family Comprehensive Stroke Center (WFCSC) at Munson Medical Center is proud to announce its recertification from The Joint Commission as Northern Michigan's first and only Comprehensive Stroke Center (CSC).

Since 2020, the number of stroke cases accepted at WFCSC has more than doubled to over 1,200 each year making it the second busiest of 16 CSCs in the state. The American Stroke Association (ASA) has cited research indicating that strokes are more common November through February due to winter weather and the holidays. Access to the highest level of stroke care including endovascular intervention is critical but also very unique for a region like Northern Michigan.

"There remain significant disparities in stroke care across the country and around the world, with rural areas typically underserved with advanced stroke therapies," said Gary Rajah, MD, Neurovascular/Cerebrovascular Neurosurgeon and WFCSC Medical and Surgical Director. "Time is brain and the over 500 emergent stroke procedures we've performed over the last five years are helping to improve outcomes, but our work is never done."

Dr. Rajah completed the region's very first thrombectomy in 2020 but prior to his arrival patients requiring that procedure had to be transferred downstate, delaying care a minimum of two hours due to travel time. Stroke is the world's leading cause of disability with each minute of delay potentially causing

the loss of four disability-free days and each hour equivalent to aging 3.6 years.

"It's been incredibly rewarding to bring this high level of stroke and neurovascular care to Northern Michigan, and the program continues to grow," added Rajah. "CSC status not only reassures our patients and their families that they are receiving the very best evidence based, innovative care, but also helps with recruitment and retention of staff system wide."

The success of the CSC has helped expand neuro care overall with the launch of Munson Neurosciences in Fall 2024. Over the last five years, Munson Healthcare has recruited six neurosurgeons and nine neurologists to the region with additional providers set to join the program this coming summer.

There are upwards of 300 Comprehensive Stroke Centers in the United States certified by The Joint Commission which represents the gold standard in stroke care. Each delivers care across the entire stroke continuum including:

- Pre-hospital coordination at smaller hospitals/critical access locations
- Emergency evaluation, and acute treatment (including IV thrombolysis and mechanical thrombectomy)
- Neuro intensive care
- Rehabilitation planning
- Long-term follow-up

Additionally, stroke related research is also a core element of CSC health, which can help provide Northern Michigan communities with treatment options beyond the standard of care for complex cases.

For more information on The Witham Family Comprehensive Stroke Center visit munsonhealthcare.org/stroke.



Stroke Club Meets for Open Discussion

Grand Traverse Bay Area Stroke Club meets at Presbyterian Church on January 14

The Grand Traverse Bay Area Stroke Club will host an open discussion during the meeting on Wednesday, January 14 from 2:30 - 4:30 p.m. at the Presbyterian Church, located at 701 Westminster Rd. in Traverse City.

Melinda Hollands, L.M.S.W., with Munson Medical Center's Patient Care Management Department, will facilitate the club meeting.

The Grand Traverse Bay Area Stroke Club is open to the public and meets on the second Wednesday of each month. The group offers stroke survivors and support persons the opportunity to learn, share, and connect through speakers, demonstrations, and discussions.

For more information, please contact Hollands at 231-935-6380.

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