

CHS: WE'RE YOUR STROKE CENTER

By **JOAN GALLER**

Staff Writer

TRENTON — Capital Health System's latest billboards deliver the message loud and clear: "We are stroke care."

It's an apt slogan to announce this week's official opening of Capital Health's new Stroke and Cerebrovascular Center of New Jersey, boasting world-class equipment, physicians and staff to treat patients in Central and South Jersey.

The \$30 million investment provides state-of-the-art procedures for stroke and other brain disorders using the region's only Biplane Angiography System, which permits physicians to see blood vessels and conduct minimally invasive procedures into the brain to treat aneurysms, malformations, head and neck tumors, and strokes.

Just three of these machines exist in the world: one in Pittsburgh, one in Stockholm, Sweden, and the one at Capital Health's Fuld Campus on Brunswick Avenue in Trenton.

Until now, patients from Central and South Jersey were flown to New York or Philadelphia "to get the highest level of care and advanced treatment for strokes and other life-threatening brain conditions," said Al Maghazeh, CEO and president of Capital Health System.

"With the acquisition of this advanced equipment, and the addition of Dr. Erol Veznedaroglu and Dr. Kenneth M. Liebman to our staff, the same quality of care is available at Capital Health," Maghazeh said in a prepared statement.

Interviewed yesterday, Veznedaroglu, who answers to Dr. Vez, says he's working now in Trenton "because I was tired of seeing people arriving at my former hospital in Philadelphia dead or with no chance for recovery. It only takes once or twice, talking to a parent of a dead child, when you know in your heart that with this treatment they would have survived."

Veznedaroglu said "60 percent of my patients came from Central or South Jersey, and I wanted to bring this to all the citizens of New Jersey."

Born in Kansas, the son of two young immigrants from Turkey, his father a physician, his mother a social worker, Dr. Vez now lives in Philadelphia with his wife, a scientist, and two young children.

Veznedaroglu, Liebman and their team of nurses and technicians left Philly for Capital Health in early November.

"This is a revolution in medicine," Vez said. "We are truly bringing something that didn't exist here before. We've had 30 admissions and done seven or eight procedures starting the second week of November, but officially our first day was Jan. 1.

"Overnight, we've turned Capital Health from a community hospital into a tertiary care hospital that can do everything here; we don't have to send patients to other hospitals," he said.

Veznedaroglu, formerly director of the Division of Cerebrovascular and Endovascular Neurosurgery at Jefferson Hospital for Neuroscience in Philadelphia, joins Capital Health as director of neuros-



Trentonian Photo/GREGG SLABODA

CHS-Fuld's CNI Team from left, radiology technician Danielle Whitaker, Dr. Kenneth Liebman, Dr. Erol Veznedaroglu, radiology technician Tim Maruska and RN Carol Kurtz.

ciences and endovascular/cerebrovascular surgery.

Liebman, formerly of New Brunswick, trained under Veznedaroglu in Philadelphia, and comes to Capital Health as director of neurosurgical critical care and oversees the neurosurgical intensive care unit.

According to Liebman, 20 percent of all Americans suffer from one or more forms of cardiovascular disease, so the ability to diagnose quickly and accurately, and to treat these conditions, is critical.

Particularly with stroke, it's important to start treatment immediately for the best outcomes, Veznedaroglu said, noting stroke symptoms include sudden numbness or weakness in the face, arm or leg, sudden confusion, trouble speaking, understanding or walking, and severe headache with no known cause.

With the new biplane technology, the physicians can conduct minimally invasive procedures to treat a wide range of medical problems, including stroke, carotid artery disease, and other vascular disorders. Benefits of catheter-based interventions include shorter hospital stays, reduced recovery time without the pain of large incisions, and less visible surgical scarring.

Veznedaroglu said he can inject dye into a catheter inserted in the patient's groin and within seconds see the problem in the brain.

"Biplane can reconstruct blood vessels in the brain with the flick of a switch," he said.

"It will allow us to complete variety of diagnostic and therapeutic procedures faster, and that means patients are off the table and on their way to recovery and discharge much sooner. It also allows us to visualize abnormalities caused by cerebrovascular disease that other systems may not detect."

Veznedaroglu said "you have to think of stroke like a heart attack, Make a quick diagnosis and then get them to a center that can do these procedures."

Stroke patients who arrive within three hours can get intravenous treatment to thin the blood, while those who arrive within the first eight hours can undergo treatment to open up blocked blood vessels and avert death or permanent paralysis.

"Since November we've done seven patients, four acute stroke cases and three open brain surgeries," Veznedaroglu said.

A Princeton woman who had the "worst headache of her life, like she was hit in the head with a brick, called her primary doctor and he sent her here," Veznedaroglu said. "We took pictures with the new biplane equipment and then pinched off the aneurysm, or blister, with clips."

This past Thursday, Veznedaroglu said his team operated on a ruptured brain aneurysm and the next day, that patient was sitting up, eating lunch and dinner.

Area residents can learn firsthand about Capital Health's stroke center at open houses to be announced in the near future. There will also be a conference to update area doctors and nurses, and an aneurysm support group is planned.