





Dr. Terry Neill demonstrates using REACHMDConsult, Inc. Wednesday at Sacred Heart Hospital. The web-based system allows specialists to reach rural hospitals in situations where time is a crucial factor in diagnosis such as strokes.

**Ben Twingley/ btwingley@pnj.com**

[Buy this photo](#)

### Warning signsof a stroke

Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body.

Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding.

Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes.

Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination.

Sudden, severe headache with no known cause.

### Related news from the Web

Latest headlines by topic:

- [Stroke](#)
- [Medicine](#)
- [Psychiatry and Neurology](#)
- [Health](#)

Powered by [Topix.net](#)

Advertisement

Patients in remote areas of Northwest Florida and south Alabama with stroke symptoms have been routinely flown to Sacred Heart as a precautionary measure, said Dr. Terry Neill, a critical care neurologist and stroke specialist at Sacred Heart. In three-fourths of the cases, the person wasn't having a stroke.

The new technology is designed to limit those unnecessary trips and to determine if clot-busting drugs will work. Quick, accurate treatment for a patient suffering a stroke is crucial. It can be the difference between recovery and life-altering disability.

Escambia and Santa Rosa counties have higher rates of stroke deaths than the state and nation. In Escambia, there are 134 stroke deaths annually per 100,000 people compared to 102 deaths for Florida statewide and 121 nationwide. Santa Rosa County's stroke death rate is 129 per 100,000, according to national health statistics.

The new technology allows Neill and Dr. Rodney Soto, a vascular neurologist and director of Sacred Heart's Stroke Center, to diagnose patients from anywhere and at any hour of the night via the Internet.

Sacred Heart is the only hospital in the region -- and one of the few in the country-- to use the technology developed by ReachMD Consult of Augusta, Ga.

The technology could eventually be used to diagnose patients requiring specialists in other areas, said Bill Hamilton of ReachMD.

Two patients at Sacred Heart's Destin hospital were the first to be examined last week using the technology. One patient's brain was already hemorrhaging and could not be administered the clot-busting drug. The other patient had minor symptoms and was able to stay in Destin, Neill said.

Sacred Heart officials hope to expand the technology to other rural hospitals in Northwest Florida and South Alabama, two areas identified as in the "stroke belt" because of the large number of cases. Many of the smaller hospitals do not now have access to a stroke specialist.

The telemedicine system is the latest example of Sacred Heart's plans to reach more patients on a regional level.

Affordable auto insurance,  
right here in town.

Online Quote

McMAHON & HADDER

Sacred Heart Chief Executive Officer Patrick Madden says the hospital is growing regionally to bring specialists' care to areas that aren't within minutes of a large medical center.

But the growth is also needed to attract top-level doctors and to pay for the millions of dollars of investment in new facilities, new technology and skilled people, Madden has said.

West Florida Healthcare also has plans in March to introduce Web-based technology with its stroke program. Its program will help connect neuro critical care experts to the emergency room at West Florida at anytime, said Kendrick Doidge, vice president for marketing and public relations.

And Baptist Health Care uses computers to give doctors throughout its system access to digital radiology images.

### Article Comments

This article does not have any comments associated with it

[Add Comment](#)

Advertisement



**Partners:** Jobs: [CareerBuilder.com](#) | Cars: [Cars.com](#) | Apartments: [Apartments.com](#) | Shopping: [ShopLocal.com](#)

Copyright © 1997-2007 the Pensacola News Journal, Pensacola Florida.  
Use of this site signifies your agreement to the [Terms of Service](#) and [Privacy Policy](#), updated June 7, 2005.