

# Funding aids stroke care system

By Tom Corwin | Staff Writer

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An innovative Web-based program that allows doctors to evaluate stroke patients at remote sites is getting a \$2 million boost to its business from the company that runs Medical College of Georgia Hospital and Clinics.

MCG Health Inc. is investing in REACH Call, which was developed at MCG and still relies on MCG neurologists to do evaluations in conjunction with 11 rural Georgia hospitals.

The health system had previously invested \$100,000 when the company started up in 2006, said REACH President and CEO Sandeep Agate. That money and \$100,000 the company won in the inaugural Georgia Research Alliance/Technology Association of Georgia start-up contest are the only outside funding the company had received, he said. Despite having only six full-time employees and no sales or marketing people, the interactive stroke care system had been adopted by 61 hospitals in seven states -- Georgia, South Carolina, Florida, Tennessee, New York, Wyoming and California, Mr. Agate said. The company could soon have a presence overseas, he said.

"Singapore has shown a tremendous amount of interest and we're in contract negotiations with them as well," he said.

But company officials recently realized it was time for an infusion of capital, said David Hess, the head of MCG Department of Neurology and one of nine co-founders of the company. Venture capital companies they talked to, however, wanted to take control of the company and move it elsewhere, he said.

"One of the things we always wanted to do is keep it an Augusta company," Dr. Hess said. But the problem with finding other capital in Augusta is "people don't invest in start-ups, technology start-ups or biotech start-ups," he said.

Enter MCG Health Inc. The company board of directors voted last week to provide the infusion of capital, which will also give it slightly less than half of the company's shares, Dr. Hess said.

"The hospital really stepped forward," he said.

"We think that this is the right product and service at the right time," said MCG Health CEO Don Snell.

The money will allow the company to hire a sales and marketing staff and add technical support, Mr. Agate said.

"What we wanted to do is get ahead of the market quickly and capture a lot of the market share," he said. They would like to eventually cover all of Georgia and perhaps the rest of the country, Mr. Agate said.

"What we're trying to do is really remove the geographic barriers with respect to stroke care, and the penalty that is associated if you live in a rural area and want to get stroke care," he said.

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## REACH CALL

**Q: How does REACH Call work?**

**A:** Typically, a larger hospital with neurologists on staff, such as Medical College of Georgia Hospital and Clinics, will serve as the "hub" hospital and will have agreements with smaller rural "spoke" hospitals, which might not have neurologists on call.

**Q: What happens at the remote site?**

**A:** They will have interactive video and computer equipment on a mobile workstation, usually in the emergency department. When a patient with a suspected stroke comes to the spoke hospital, it can contact the hub.

**Q: What happens at the hub?**

**A:** The neurologist at the hub logs into a secure Web-based system in REACH and then evaluates the patient through the interactive video system and can see key test results, particularly a CT scan to rule out bleeding in the brain. The software helps the neurologist evaluate the data and supports a treatment decision. The patient can be given a clot-busting drug to help reduce the risk of long-term damage. The drug must be given within three hours of the start of the stroke, which is what keeps most patients from receiving it.

**REACH'S REACH**

Since REACH began in 2006, it has spread to 61 centers in seven states. In Georgia alone, 700 patients have been treated through REACH and more than 150 have received a clot-buster, a rate that far exceeds the national average of 2 percent to 4 percent of stroke patients receiving the drug.