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Royal Columbian Hospital at Forefront of Vascular Interventional Radiology in Western Canada with Angiojet Clot Removal System

New Westminster, BC, April 12, 2007 — With the addition of an Angiojet Thrombectomy machine at Royal Columbian Hospital (RCH), patients with potentially life-threatening blood clots can now be treated using high-tech clot-removal technology that was previously unavailable west of Toronto.

Before the Angiojet, the Vascular Interventional Radiology department at RCH had limited success treating clotted veins and arteries in the arms, chest and lungs. Compared to invasive surgeries or standard pharmacological treatments that use clot-busting drugs and blood thinner medication administered through an intravenous (IV) for up to two days, the Angiojet can take just minutes to dissolve potentially deadly blood clots in patients' arteries at their site. Saline jets spray clot-busting drugs directly onto the blood clot, dissolving up to 95 per cent of it, and a strong vacuum suctions the clot out of the body through a small catheter.

"The Angiojet is like a 'vacuum cleaner for the blood vessels,' with a drive unit, pump and specially designed catheter which we thread through a patient's veins or arteries," says Dr. Brad Halkier, Interventional Radiologist at RCH. "It adds a very effective, leading-edge technology tool to our tool kit that allows us to treat more patients and offer a less invasive, more cost-effective solution to traditional drug therapies or surgical options."

The high-tech device provides treatment for more patients than ever. "We can now dissolve clots in vessels that were not previously accessible, including deep vein thrombosis of the legs, or DVT, clots in central veins and pulmonary arteries," says Dr. Halkier. Blood clots can travel to the heart, lungs or brains and cause patients to experience chest pain, difficulty breathing or possible death from a heart attack or stroke. "The Angiojet is very effective in cases where patients have multiple major clots and are at risk of dying. It also works well to clear fistulas for kidney dialysis patients to keep their veins open and allow the dialysis to flow," adds Dr. Halkier.

Angiojet offers many benefits over surgery or standard drug therapies, which are lengthy, more expensive and can be risky as doctors can't predict how well the drugs will work on a patient. With Angiojet, patients spend less time in a hospital bed and their outcomes are much more effective. "We didn't treat patients as aggressively before because we were not equipped with the tools that would allow us to," says Dr. Halkier. "Some patients who were not good candidates can now be treated successfully with the Angiojet."

The Angiojet was funded in December 2006 by Ed and Diane Les, long-time supporters of RCH, which serves 1.5 million people from Burnaby to Boston Bar. "For several years, we have helped purchase new equipment for various departments throughout the hospital in order to benefit more patients," says Ed Les. "We are very excited about this new clot-busting procedure. It is less invasive and saves so much time, which enables patients with serious conditions to suffer less and recover more quickly. The Angiojet appears to be a remarkable machine that we are proud to help fund."

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Recently, Dr. Halkier used the Angiojet on a female patient suffering with extreme swelling in her legs which was caused by numerous blood clots. “We took pictures of her legs before we performed the procedure,” says Dr. Halkier. Using Angiojet, it took less than an hour to remove all the blood clots. “The patient told us that she immediately felt huge relief and that the pain in her legs was gone,” says Dr. Halkier, who took another picture of her legs after the procedure. “We could see a dramatic difference right away. The swelling in her legs was significantly reduced. Even better, our patient instantly felt a tremendous amount of relief from the pain that she had been living with.”

Most doctors in the region aren’t aware that this new technology is available at RCH and can be a viable option for their patients. “We want to get the word out,” says Dr. Halkier. “There are so many cases where we can really make a significant difference and treat patients with large clotted veins who we could not have treated before. This is a remarkably common issue that affects people of all ages. DVT patients often suffer with debilitating pain and this treatment can provide relief within minutes. That’s what we’re here for. Perhaps to save money for hospitals, but ultimately to improve the quality of life for our patients,” says Dr. Halkier.

The Angiojet procedure is available to all patients, whether they are an inpatient at RCH or referred by physicians from hospitals across the Fraser Health region. It is usually a treatment option for patients who have already been referred to and assessed by a vascular specialist, and meet the clinical criteria for this procedure.

“The RCH Foundation is especially grateful to our donors whose generosity provides capital funding for vital equipment benefiting hundreds of patients each year,” says Adrienne Bakker, President and CEO of the RCH Foundation. “Without their interest in caring about others and providing philanthropic support, the hospital would not have been able to fund this new technology as well as vital equipment in many departments throughout the hospital.”

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About Royal Columbian Hospital (RCH) Foundation

RCH Foundation is an independent charitable organization that raises millions of dollars every year to fund priority equipment needs and enhancements to patient care at Royal Columbian Hospital. Approximately 1.5 million people from Burnaby to Boston Bar depend on Royal Columbian to provide highly specialized care for major trauma emergencies, cardiac and neurosurgery, renal treatment, high risk maternity and newborn intensive care. For more information about the RCH Foundation or to make a donation, please call 604-520-4438 or visit www.rchfoundation.com.

Images Available Upon Request:

Pre- & Post- Angiojet treatment images of a vein where the blood clot was removed
Three images of catheter illustrating how it sprays clot-busting drugs and suctions clot from a vein

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