

What are **Primary** and **Comprehensive** Stroke Centers? And what are the differences?



During the past several decades, stroke care in the United States has substantially evolved, with organizations such as the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association, Brain Attack Coalition, and National Stroke Association all being at the forefront of this movement. One of the major advancements is the organization of care that has and is being transformed by **primary and comprehensive stroke centers**.

The following information will help you to understand what is a primary stroke center and what is a comprehensive stroke center and outline the differences between the two.

Primary Stroke Center:

In 2003 the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association and The Joint Commission agreed on a certification process for stroke care through a Disease-Specific Certification program that included a voluntary evaluation process driven by the demonstration of a consistent approach to clinical outcome measurement and minimum standards for stroke care built around acute ischemic stroke treatment.

Eligibility Standards:

- A dedicated stroke-focused program
- Staffing by qualified medical professionals trained in stroke care
- Individualized care to meet stroke patients' needs
- Patient involvement in their hospital care
- Coordination of post-discharge patient self-care based on recommendations of the Brain Attack Coalition and guidelines published by the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association or equivalent guidelines
- Streamlined flow of patient information while protecting patient rights, security and privacy
- Collection of the hospital's stroke-treatment performance data
- Hospital team performance data
- Use of data to assess and continually improve quality of care for stroke patients

Comprehensive Stroke Center:

In September 2012, the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association AHA/ASA and The Joint Commission launched Comprehensive Stroke Center (CSC) certification. This new level of certification recognizes the achievement of infrastructure, staff and training standards to support state-of-the-art care for the most complex cases.

Comprehensive stroke centers provide a structure to take stroke care to a new level of excellence, the potential for handling more complicated stroke cases and a venue to provide better outcomes

Eligibility Standards:

Standards include all components of a Primary Stroke Center plus:

- Availability of advanced imaging techniques, including MRI/MRA, CTA, DSA and TCD
- Availability of personnel trained in vascular neurology, neurosurgery and endovascular procedures
- 24/7 availability of personnel, imaging, operating room and endovascular facilities
- ICU/neuroscience ICU facilities and capabilities
- Experience and expertise treating patients with large ischemic strokes, intracerebral hemorrhage and subarachnoid hemorrhage

PRIMARY STROKE CENTER VS. COMPREHENSIVE STROKE CENTER

PATIENT CARE

PRIMARY

Takes care of most cases of ischemic (blood vessel blockage) types of stroke.

COMPREHENSIVE

Cares for all types of stroke patients, (blood vessel blockage) including bleeding (or hemorrhagic) strokes, such as those caused by brain aneurysms.

PATIENT TRANSFERS

PRIMARY

Sends complex patients to a Comprehensive Stroke Center.

COMPREHENSIVE

Receives patients from Primary Stroke Centers.

MINIMALLY INVASIVE CATHETER PROCEDURES

PRIMARY

Not required.

COMPREHENSIVE

24/7 access to minimally invasive

NEUROSURGERY

PRIMARY

Access to neurosurgery within 2 hours.

COMPREHENSIVE

On-site neurosurgical availability 24/7 with the ability to perform complex neurovascular procedures, such as brain aneurysm clipping, vascular malformation surgery and carotid endarterectomy.

SPECIALIZED ICU

PRIMARY

No requirement for a separate intensive care for stroke patients.

COMPREHENSIVE

Dedicated neuroscience intensive care unit for unit stroke patients.