

# Strokes need FAST action

✘ An Edinburgh stroke patient who went on to win gold medals in veterans' championships has helped launch a campaign for people in Lothian to recognise a stroke – and to act fast.

Bill Gentleman joined the Scottish Health Secretary Nicola Sturgeon MSP and representatives of Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland (CHSS) NHS Lothian's Managed Clinical Network (MCN) for Stroke and the Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) to kick off a major advertising campaign to help people recognise the signs of stroke and seek help urgently.

"It was the surprise of my life that I had suffered a stroke because I am so fit. It is very important that people learn to recognise the symptoms of stroke because getting treatment as quickly as possible is vital."

The FAST campaign is designed to emphasise that calling 999 as soon as possible if stroke symptoms are suspected could save a life and limit damage to the brain.

The FAST message was developed by leading stroke physicians and focuses on how an attack affects the Face, Arms and Speech. The T represents time to call the emergency services.

Ambulances wrapped in the FAST campaign message will be seen throughout Edinburgh and Lothian.

Bill, who's now 70, was discharged from hospital 12 days after his stroke in August 2008 and was determined to regain his fitness. He embarked on a gentle exercise regime and six months after his stroke he threw the hammer for the first time. In March this year he competed in the Kamloops World Masters Indoor Championships in Canada.

"I won two golds for the hammer and weight throw, it felt absolutely brilliant," said Bill. "I'm just back from the

European Veterans Athletics Championship in Hungary, where I won silver in the hammer and the weight throw.”

David Clark, Chief Executive, CHSS, wants to raise public awareness of the symptoms of a stroke and the need to seek help urgently. He said: “Stroke can happen to anyone at any age. Around 1000 people every year have a stroke and are admitted to hospital in Lothian. The FAST campaign highlights that stroke is a medical emergency. You can’t see the damage it causes but emergency treatment can make all the difference to your chances of making the best possible recovery.”

Professor Martin Dennis, Stroke Consultant, NHS Lothian, said: “There has been a huge change in attitude to Stroke in recent years with a growing understanding that it should be treated with the same sort of urgency as a heart attack because rapid treatment can make a huge difference in preventing further damage to the brain and can help someone make a full recovery. Delay increases the risk of death or major long-term disabilities, such as paralysis, severe memory loss and communication problems. It is vital that the symptoms are not ignored in the hope they will go away.”

Pauline Howie, Chief Executive, Scottish Ambulance Service, said, “Stroke is the greatest single cause of severe disability in Scotland and the third most common cause of death. It also impacts on the lives of many others who provide care to those who have suffered a stroke. We have developed care pathways specifically for stroke cases to ensure that symptoms are recognised quickly and patients benefit from speedy access to the most appropriate care.”

The Lothian FAST campaign includes the distribution of 100,000 small cards to local pharmacies. The cards, which alert people on what to watch out for and when to dial 999, will be placed inside prescription bags for certain patients. Pharmacies are being asked to target those receiving statins, warfarin, digoxin, blood pressure tablets and aspirin. The cards can

then be stored in patients' wallets.