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Media Release

American football pro supports key stroke research study at RUH

A former professional American football player who suffered a stroke aged just 51 is taking part in a new national stroke study being supported by the Royal United Hospital Bath NHS Foundation Trust.

Rob Hart, from Edington in Wiltshire, was placekicker for some of the biggest NFL teams from 2002-2004, including the Miami Dolphins, Tampa Bay Buccaneers and New Orleans Saints.

He was particularly well known to gridiron fans as he kicked barefoot, with one boot on and one boot off.

Since his football career ended, Rob has continued to keep fit, running a marathon and also completing an incredible 100km charity run this year.

It was when he started having heart palpitations earlier this year that he visited his GP, who booked him in for an ECG, a test that records the electrical activity of the heart, including its rate and rhythm.

However, before he could attend his appointment he suffered a stroke.

Rob said: "I started feeling really dizzy and my eyesight started going too. Then my hand went completely numb.

"Fortunately my wife was with me at the time and she thought it could be a stroke. She called NHS 111, who organised an ambulance straight away.

"It was a very scary time, not just for me but for my wife and children too, we just didn't know what was happening."

Once he arrived at the RUH it was found that Rob had suffered a stroke on the right side of his brain.

“The doctors said that the heart palpitations had caused a blood clot to travel to my brain,” said Rob.

“I’ve lost about 15% of my sight in both eyes, otherwise I’ve been very lucky that there’s no other significant damage to my health.

“I’ve made some changes to my lifestyle since and the doctors are hopeful that it won’t happen again.”

Talking about his experience to mark World Stroke Day (Thursday 29 October), Rob thanked the RUH staff for the care he had received.

“I could not have asked for better care,” he said. “Everyone I came into contact with, from the ambulance team to the staff in the hospital, were wonderful.

“They were so supportive and reassuring, I really couldn’t have asked for more from anyone.”

Following his stroke, Rob signed up to be part of the National Young Stroke Study. Open to all stroke patients aged under 55, the study aims to get a better understanding of the key risk factors that contribute to strokes at younger ages.

The number of new stroke cases in adults under the age of 55 has doubled in the last 10 years in the UK and in other high-income countries. However, the reasons for this increase remain unclear.

The purpose of the study is to find out how traditional stroke risk factors that are more common at older ages, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol level, smoking and obesity, might contribute to the occurrence of stroke at younger ages.

The study is also hoping to find out if emerging stroke risk factors also play a role in the rising number of young stroke cases, such as long working hours, stress and mental health conditions.

Participants simply complete a short questionnaire through an interview with the research team at the RUH to find out more about things like their past medical history, lifestyle-related factors and family history.

Rob said: “I was more than happy to take part. It was really straightforward and if it can in some way help raise awareness of potential new risk factors for strokes and how they can be prevented, then that can only be a good thing.

“I would encourage people to consider taking part in research studies like this – you really could make a vital difference to others in years to come.”

The study is being run by the University of Oxford, in partnership with local hospital research teams across the country.

The RUH is a research-active hospital and over the last year the Trust has been involved with more than 300 studies, recruiting 4,800 participants to its portfolio of trials.

You can find out more about research at the RUH and how to get involved on [our website](#).

There's lots more information about the symptoms and treatments for strokes on the [NHS website](#).

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Notes to Editor:

At the RUH we're proud to put people at the heart of what we do, striving to create an environment where everyone matters. Everyone means the people we care for, the people we work with and the people in our community.

We provide a wide range of services including medicine and surgery, services for women and children, accident and emergency services, and diagnostic and clinical support services.

We also provide specialist services for rheumatology, chronic pain and chronic fatigue syndrome/ME via the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases which we acquired in 2015.

In 2021, we acquired Sulis Hospital Bath, an independent hospital that provides care for both private and NHS patients. This has enabled us to provide more care for NHS patients, as well as continuing to provide private care to those who choose it. Any additional income earned through private care is reinvested in NHS services for the benefit of the people we care for.

Our new Dyson Cancer Centre brings together many of the RUH's cancer services under one roof to provide a cancer services hub for over 500,000 people in the South West. The centre includes the RUH's oncology, chemotherapy and radiotherapy services, a 22-bed inpatient ward, a dedicated pharmacy, research team and nuclear medicine and physics teams.

A key feature of the new centre is the Macmillan Wellbeing Hub. The three-storey hub provides a welcoming, non-clinical space designed around the needs of patients and their families. It also includes comfortable accommodation where relatives and loved ones can stay overnight.

We work closely with other health and care organisations as members of the Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire Integrated Care Board. We strive to improve the health and wellbeing of the people in our community by working together build one of the healthiest places to live and work.

We are rated 'Good' by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

For more information about the Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust visit: www.ruh.nhs.uk