B.C. philanthropist becomes champion of stroke care; Djavad Mowafaghian donates $2 million to hospital foundation

The humble philanthropist who has given at least $65 mil-lion over the past eight years to B.C. health and education causes handed over another $2 million Wednesday. He sounded apologetic it wasn't more.

"It's a small amount as a donation. I wish I had more, like $100 million, but I don't have it," **Djavad Mowafaghian** said at an event organized by the VGH and UBC Hospital Foundation to formally announce his donation toward stroke care.

Five floors up, in the hospital tower, 50 stroke patients were being cared for in the neurosciences unit that will now be named after the generous 84-year old who spent a few months in Lions Gate Hospital after his own stroke in April 2010. Two months ago, Mowafaghian returned to that hospital with a $4-million cheque to say thanks.

"I was going to my dressing room to pick a tie and I fell down," Mowafaghian recalled in an interview about the morning he had a close brush with mortality. It was more than 80 years ago that his father succumbed to a stroke. A baby at the time, Mowafaghian was not even walking when his father died.

Following Mowafaghian's stroke, the Tehran-born businessman was initially unable to walk. But he has had a largely successful rehabilitation that has seen him progress from a wheelchair, to a walker, to a cane, and now to no walking aid.

When he was well enough, he asked for a meeting with B.C.'s leading stroke specialist, Dr. Philip Teal, director of the BC Centre for Stroke and Cerebro-vascular Disease. When he told Teal he wanted to make a donation, the neurologist instantly imagined how to use it: for the recruitment of young experts like Dr. Negar Asdaghi, whose area of expertise is stroke imaging.

The 28 neurology residents doing five-year, postgraduate residency training programs at Vancouver General Hospital make it the biggest such pro-gram in Canada. Teal said the donation will help ensure that stroke specialists who leave VGH temporarily to do fellow-ship training at tony centres like Stanford University will come back.

He is most excited about a Telestroke initiative that permits stroke experts at VGH to do real-time virtual video conferencing with doctors, their patients and their families at smaller hospitals throughout B.C.

Although the Telestroke technology is now linked only with hospitals in White Rock and Chilliwack, it will eventually allow VGH experts to see what's happening inside stroke patients' brains, whether they are in Powell River, Penticton or any other community with a CT scanner.

The gift from the **Djavad Mowafaghian** Foundation is the largest ever given toward stroke care in B.C.

Teal said that as one of the most devastating diseases, stroke has far to go in the treatment and research fields.

"We are truly in search of champions. We needed one, and now we have him," he said about Mowafaghian.

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Illustration:
• / **Djavad Mowafaghian** was initially unable to walk after suffering a stroke in April 2010.