

EP25.02

Identification of post-stroke cognitive impairment in the UK

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Background: Cognitive impairment following a stroke is common. For one in ten individuals, this will convert to dementia within the first year following their stroke. In the United Kingdom (UK), stroke-survivors require a review of their cognition prior to hospital discharge and then six months following their stroke prior to discharge from secondary care. This is to ensure that those at the greatest risk of developing dementia are identified to the primary care team. The Sentinel Stroke National Audit Programme (SSNAP) audits the quality of stroke care in the UK, which includes the assessment of cognition following a stroke. At present, it is unclear what proportion of these individuals is being identified.

Methods: Data was extracted from the SSNAP's database (July 2013 – June 2015). Data collected included whether the patient was a) screened for cognition prior to hospital discharge b) screened for mood, behaviour or cognition since discharge at six-months.

Results: 76253 stroke-survivors were eligible for cognition screening; 73.9% of these individuals were screened for cognition by discharge. For those that were not screened, the reasons given were: medically unwell (15.9%), organisational reasons (5.8%), patient refused (0.8%), unknown (3.6%). At the 6-month review, 30143 stroke-survivors were eligible for assessment of mood, behaviour and cognition screening; 67.6% of these individuals were screened. 21.8% needed support with 61.5% of these individuals receiving the required psychological support.

Conclusions: One in five stroke-survivors need some form of psychological support for their mood, behaviour or cognitive difficulties. Around a third do not receive this support. It is currently unclear what happens to this subset of stroke-survivors, nor the long-term cognitive sequelae of all stroke-survivors with some cognitive deficit. Family doctors need to be aware of these individuals who are at increased risk of developing dementia to be able to identify and support them when required.