

## National patient survey of stroke care in England

Howell E., Reeves R.

### Objective:

To evaluate stroke services in England based on patients' experiences of hospital and post-discharge care by monitoring progress of hospital organisations with regard to the implementation of the fifth standard of the National Service Framework (NSF) for Older People.<sup>1</sup> The survey aimed to identify areas for quality improvement.

### Methods:

An advisory group of stroke care experts assisted with the development of the questionnaire, which was tested at length with stroke patients and carers. A mailed pilot survey was carried out in three hospital organisations.

One third of hospital organisations in England (51) were randomly selected for participation in the survey that was carried out between October-December 2004. Questionnaires were sent to all patients admitted between April and June 2004, who had been discharged alive by the date the sample was drawn, and who had a primary stroke diagnosis. Up to two reminder letters were sent to non-responders. There was potential for some patients to have been incorrectly coded on the hospital systems as having a stroke, so each hospital was required to get the sample of patients validated by a clinician to confirm that the patients had had a stroke and were therefore eligible for the study.

If the patient was unable to complete the questionnaire as a result of aphasia or confusion the carer could respond on the patients' behalf, and this was recorded in the questionnaire. Opportunity was also given in the questionnaire for respondents to comment in their own words on their experiences of stroke care.

### Results:

Questionnaires were sent to 2,786 patients and completed questionnaires were received from 1,713 (adjusted response rate 65%).

Respondents were positive about the overall care and treatment they received for their stroke; 70% rated their care excellent or very good. However, examples of problems identified were doctors talking in front of patients as if they weren't there (38%), not enough nursing staff (37%) and failure to involve patients fully in decision making (53%). Respondents also reported getting insufficient help with speech and communication difficulties (50%), emotional problems (61%) and mobility (39%). Not enough information was given to patients about medication side effects (62%), diet (43%), and exercise (33%). The qualitative data provided a huge range of rich information.

Patients who stayed on a specialist stroke unit reported more positive experiences of their stroke care and treatment compared to those patients that had stayed on another type of ward ( $f=67$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

### Conclusions:

This survey demonstrated the value of using a validated survey instrument to measure patients' experiences of stroke services. It revealed areas where the quality of care for stroke patients requires improvement to meet the standards outlined in the National Service Framework for Older People. Whilst previous research has shown that specialist stroke units have a positive effect on health outcomes,<sup>2</sup> this survey also provides evidence that patients' have better experiences when treated on a stroke unit. Obtaining the patient perspective is an important component of evaluating health services, and such patient surveys should routinely form part of the assessment of stroke services.

1. Department of Health (2001) *National Service Framework for Older People*. London: Department of Health.

2. Stroke Unit Trialists Collaboration (2000) Organised inpatient (stroke unit) care for stroke. *The Cochrane Library, Issue 4*. Oxford: Update Software.