

Behavioural activation therapy for post-stroke depression: the BEADS feasibility RCT

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Declared competing interests of authors: Shirley A Thomas and Avril ER Drummond report grants from the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) and the Stroke Association outside the submitted work. Rebecca L Palmer is an author of the Consent Support Tool, which was piloted in the work and is discussed in the report. Roshan das Nair is a member of the NIHR Health Services and Delivery Research Board. Nicholas R Latimer is supported by the NIHR (NIHR Post Doctoral Fellowship PDF-2015-08-022). Stephen J Walters is a member of the NIHR Health Technology Assessment (HTA) Clinical Trials Board and the NIHR HTA Funding Boards Policy Group; he also reports grants from the NIHR HTA programme during the conduct of the study, personal fees from royalties, research grants from the NIHR and the Medical Research Council, personal fees from external examining fees and book royalties outside the submitted work. Cindy L Cooper is a member of the NIHR Clinical Trials Unit Standing Advisory Committee.

Published September 2019

DOI: 10.3310/hta23470

Plain English summary

The BEADS feasibility RCT

Health Technology Assessment 2019; Vol. 23: No. 47

DOI: 10.3310/hta23470

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Plain English summary

Approximately one-third of stroke patients experience depression, which can have negative effects on recovery and quality of life (QoL). Currently, we do not have sufficient evidence to indicate which psychological interventions are effective and affordable to the NHS for treating post-stroke depression.

We aimed to determine whether or not it is feasible to conduct a future large-scale study to evaluate a psychological intervention, called behavioural activation (BA) therapy, for treating post-stroke depression. BA aims to improve mood by identifying what stroke patients enjoy doing and helping them to undertake these activities. BA can be used with all stroke patients with depression, including people with cognitive or communication difficulties.

We recruited 48 post-stroke patients who had suffered a stroke between 3 months and 5 years previously. People with dementia or significant aphasia were excluded. Participants were divided into two groups at random. About half of the participants received BA over a 4-month period and the other half did not. Participants received all other available care. After 6 months, participants completed questionnaires about their mood, activity level and QoL. We also interviewed 16 participants and 10 carers about their views on the actual research process and therapy.

Although we were able to recruit participants to the study, we recruited fewer than the original target of 72 participants owing to delays in starting recruitment. However, we have identified ways to improve participant recruitment in a future study. We found that it was feasible to deliver BA, and the therapy was found to be acceptable to participants, carers and therapists. The results indicate that the benefits of conducting a large-scale future study would outweigh the costs. However, the main consideration will be whether or not we could identify enough stroke services able to run the study for a long enough period to recruit the large number of participants required.

ISSN 1366-5278 (Print)

ISSN 2046-4924 (Online)

Impact factor: 3.819

Health Technology Assessment is indexed in MEDLINE, CINAHL, EMBASE, The Cochrane Library and the Clarivate Analytics Science Citation Index.

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This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HTA programme as project number 13/14/01. The contractual start date was in September 2014. The draft report began editorial review in October 2017 and was accepted for publication in March 2018. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HTA editors and publisher have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the draft document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health and Social Care. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health and Social Care.

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