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

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Plain English summary

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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.
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This report

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