

Delivery, dose, outcomes and resource use of stroke therapy: the SSNAPIEST observational study

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Plain English summary

The SSNAPIEST observational study

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Plain English summary

Physical, occupational and speech therapy plus psychology are key to recovery after a stroke, yet most patients receive very little. We wanted to understand why. We analysed data from the Sentinel Stroke National Audit Programme, which includes details of all stroke patients in England, Wales and Northern Ireland from 2013 to 2015.

Nearly all patients who needed therapy received it, but only 5% were reported to need psychology. This may be an underestimate, as services are often unavailable. The amount of therapy per day of stay was low: between 2 minutes (psychology) and 14 minutes (physiotherapy). Therapy was also infrequent; most patients received treatment on only 20–60% of the days when they needed it.

The amount of therapy received by the patient was related to the patient's characteristics (e.g. stroke severity) and the organisation treating them, for example the type of stroke unit, therapy and nurse staffing levels, and the presence of weekend therapy and early supported discharge services.

We found that patients took highly varied routes through stroke services, but we identified four common pathways. We also developed a new way of categorising patients according to their problems. This could be used to work out what therapy patients should receive.

We found that the need for therapy and the amount of therapy per day were associated with the cost of inpatient stroke care: the more therapy, the lower the cost. There was much unexplained variation in costs between stroke care teams.

Greater amounts of any type of therapy were associated with shorter hospital stays and fewer deaths. The relationship between the amount of therapy and other outcomes was complex and needs further exploration. We also need more research to find out how therapies should be targeted to patients with different needs and how best to organise stroke therapy services.

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