

Stroke: who listens to the carers?

A qualitative interview study with carers of people with stroke on an in-patient rehabilitation unit. Ingrid Watmough, Advanced Specialist Physiotherapist, Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust. Ingrid.watmough@nchc.nhs.uk

Background: After having a stroke it is well recognised that people are more prone to depression and anxiety. The well-being of those who care for people with stroke is linked to this, with informal carers reporting a sense of 'lives turned upside down'. Conversations on the In-patient Stroke Rehabilitation Unit at Norwich Community Hospital between staff and carers reveal that they feel that they are not communicated with and supported in the way that they would like. Carers voice concerns about not having enough information or support to enable them to cope after their relative's discharge from hospital.

Aim of the Project: To understand how staff can engage with carers of stroke patients on the in-patient stroke rehabilitation unit to determine how they may best meet their needs as a service and provide ongoing support and information.

Method:

- Semi-structured interviews with 9 carers of stroke patients
- Results were qualitatively analysed to determine emerging themes around carer engagement.



Theme 1: Uncertainty about the future

- Carers felt vulnerable and actively sought help and support in order to make sense of what had happened.
- They described the shock of the stroke and how they struggled to access information.



'I just want to be told what's going on'

'things are changing from day to day'

'on a journey of ups and downs'

'do you mind if I cry?'

'even something like bringing the dog in'

'therapy so she can walk'

'stroke patients are quite vulnerable'

'she got the right people to look after her'

'she wanted to know how I felt'

'you can come at a time that suits you'

'the way she explained it made me feel better'

I'm all ears...

Theme 2: Information as reassurance and support

- Carers recognised that Staff were approachable and friendly and actively sought them out to provide daily updates.
- Information was seen as providing hope for the future, particularly when reporting on progress.

Conclusions:

- Staff can develop closer relationships with carers in in-patient rehabilitation by actively seeking out opportunities for conversation and by being willing to explain more complex medical information.
- Staff can also provide support and reassurance for carers, helping to reduce anxiety and stress when looking towards the future and planning discharge from hospital.
- A recently set up Relatives group has received positive feedback from carers.