

Stroke survivor experience of being supported to return to work: A case study series

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Background & Aim

Over 110,000 people experience stroke every year; a quarter are of working age ^[1]. Only around half of stroke survivors make a meaningful return to work ^[2]. As part of a multi-centre randomised controlled trial (RETurn to work After stroke [HTA 15/130/11])^[3] assessing the clinical and cost-effectiveness of early stroke specific vocational rehabilitation (ESSVR) on stroke survivors' 12-month work status, we explored and compared the experiences of stroke survivors receiving usual care only and those receiving usual care + ESSVR.



Method

Longitudinal case studies captured the experiences of stroke survivors, nominated carers, employers and treating occupational therapists. Data were generated from semi-structured qualitative interviews, NHS therapy records and stroke survivors' resource-use questionnaires. Analysis was underpinned by Normalisation Process Theory and the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF). Participants' experiences is summarised and comparison made within and between cases.

Results

Case study data was captured for 26 participants (11 usual care, 15 ESSVR + usual care) including 11 participants' NHS therapy records, 74 interview transcripts. Data were synthesised with a view to understanding stroke survivors' return to work experiences when receiving either ESSVR coordinated by an occupational therapist or usual post-stroke care. Four cases (two usual-care and two usual care + ESSVR) with contrasting experiences of RTW support and RTW outcome are illustrated below.

	Usual-Care Only	ESSVR + Usual Care
Successful Return to Work	<p>'Daniel' Male, 31</p> <p>Job title: Data Analyst (large company) Impact of stroke: Left-sided fine motor difficulties, spatial awareness, fatigue Support for RTW: Comprehensive in-house vocational rehabilitation processes at work through occupational doctor RTW Outcome: Returned to work in full capacity</p> <p>Influencing Factors: In-laws are OTs (substantial informal support), able to work from home during COVID-19 (facilitated return)</p>	<p>'Adam' Male, 40</p> <p>Job title: Doctor (public sector) Impact of stroke: Significant fatigue and speech difficulties Support for RTW: RETAKE OT, early supported discharge physiotherapist and speech and language therapist, psychology for short time. RTW Outcome: Returned to work in full capacity</p> <p>Influencing factors: Heart condition, major surgery before 12m post-stroke. Pressure to accelerate phased RTW due to COVID-19.</p>
Did Not Return to Work	<p>'Sean' Male, 62</p> <p>Job title: Architect (self-employed) Impact of stroke: Double vision and executive dysfunction Support for RTW: Early supported discharge OT, Community neuropsychologist consultation RTW Outcome: No RTW by 18-months post-stroke, business failed Influencing factors: Mounting financial pressure with no financial support, caring for daughter with substantial special needs</p>	<p>'James' Male, 62</p> <p>Job title: Security officer (small company) Impact of stroke: Severe impact on communication, physical functioning and low mood Support for RTW: RETAKE OT, Physio and SALT RTW Outcome: Unable to RTW and withdrew from intervention</p> <p>Influencing factors: Unable to achieve independence in ADL during RETAKE intervention period, creating insurmountable barrier to RTW.</p>

Conclusion: Biological, psychological, socio-economic and employer factors influence RTW outcomes post stroke and may impact ESSVR effectiveness. Understanding their inter-relationship will inform evaluation of the effectiveness of the RETAKE trial and future research.

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References

^[1] Stroke Association. 2020. ^[2] Daniel K, Wolfe CD, Busch MA, McKeivitt C. What are the social consequences of stroke for working-aged adults? A systematic review. Stroke. 2009;40(6):e431-40. ^[3] Radford, KA, Craven, K, McLellan, V et al. An individually randomised controlled multi-centre pragmatic trial with embedded economic and process evaluations of early vocational rehabilitation compared with usual care for stroke survivors: study protocol for the RETurn to work After stroke (RETAKE) trial. Trials 21, 1010 (2020).

