

# Title: Development and evaluation of a co-designed online psychoeducational family group on an acute stroke unit during COVID-19 hospital visiting restrictions.

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## Objectives

- To use a co-design approach to develop and evaluate an online stroke psychoeducation and support group for relatives of patients on an Acute Stroke Unit during pandemic related visiting restrictions.
- The multidisciplinary team (MDT) involved in the project, recruited carers and family members of the stroke patients on the ward. The team aimed to increase knowledge and understanding of stroke, provide emotional support and peer support opportunities.

## Background

Covid-19 hospital visiting restrictions changed the experiences of patients, relatives and staff on acute stroke units with minimal opportunity for relatives to learn about stroke recovery and rehabilitation through direct observation and interactions with care teams. This period of acute care post stroke is already a time of heightened anxiety and distress for family members, who often report a sense of 'unpreparedness' for the changes in role following discharge<sup>1</sup>

Guided by recent literature supporting the benefits of multidimensional interventions for caregivers incorporating psychological components<sup>2</sup> an online group for relatives was developed using co-design methodology to fill the gap by providing psychological support, education and peer support opportunities.

## Results

- Nine caregivers completed the intervention of which five completed >3 sessions. Five females and four males participants attended the session. The subjects age ranged between 18 y.o. and 65 y.o.
- Descriptive statistics of pre-post intervention indicated a reduction in scores on mood measures (N=3).
- Qualitative feedback indicated participants valued 'being able to ask questions to MDT members', and wanted 'more opportunity to share experiences.'

'You just feel so confused, now it makes more sense even if it is sad'

'It was so nice to understand more...we felt less alone'

## Phase 1

Co-designed approach: group development included perspectives of both relatives and MDT members

5 relatives recruited from the ASU participated in semi-structured interviews to explore their perceptions of their education and support needs during COVID-19 visiting restrictions.

Resulting themes/topics included:

**Knowledge and information**- wanting to understand how the stroke has affected their relative

**Understanding the course of recovery** – how much change to expect and how long does this take?

**Wanting to do/act** - How to help/get involved from home?

Five senior MDT members and a stroke charity representative were interviewed to gather their views on key information/themes to include in the group content. They identified the following:

- Education on physical, cognitive and emotional needs of stroke survivors
- Emotional support and validation with strategies to manage anxiety/ stress
- Provide information on the roles of keyworker/ MDT and set expectations around time/availability of staff
- Provide a clear picture of the discharge process/how to prepare and where to seek help

Individual session content was generated from themes and ideas generated from interviews and literature review for most recent evidenced based information on stroke recovery and rehabilitation.

Leading to the development of a 4 session programme.

## Conclusions

- A strength of the co-designed psychoeducational group is the thorough approach to the methodology involving relative and MDT's perspectives.
- Overall, feedback from participating relatives and staff members was positive.
- A limitation was not including the stroke survivor in the co-design process.
- Further research to demonstrate the effectiveness of the online intervention, to provide an evidence base for its use in clinical practice.

## Phase 2

Twelve caregivers were recruited. Key-workers referred family members to the neuropsychology team

The four-session virtual programme was delivered weekly co-facilitated by psychology and MDT members.

Pre and post measures of mood were administered and qualitative feedback was collected after the final session.

## Session Topic

**SESSION 1: Understanding stroke and how it affects a person and their relatives**

Facilitated by the Psychology team

**SESSION 2: Rehabilitation, everyone plays a part: MDT; patients; and relatives**

Facilitated by Psychology and SLT

**SESSION 3: Impacts on thinking and everyday activities**

Facilitated by Psychology and OT

**SESSION 4: Emotional impacts on patient and relatives; preparing for discharge**

Facilitated by Psychology and local Stroke Association lead

## References

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