

Healthcare professionals in stroke rehabilitation perceive goal setting as a dynamic ongoing process: A systematic review

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Introduction

- Goal setting is an integral component of stroke rehabilitation, defined as a collaborative process where patients and the multidisciplinary team agree on specific, time-limited targets.
- Research on patients’ perspectives suggest that goal setting is not consistently implemented in stroke rehabilitation and does not involve patients and families in a meaningful way.
- Healthcare professionals are central to goal setting, yet their perspectives have not been synthesised and critically appraised.

Methods

Design: Systematic review and qualitative synthesis
Databases: PubMed · PsycINFO · MEDLINE · CINAHL (searched in May 2025)
Eligibility: English-language qualitative or mixed-methods studies with qualitative data on healthcare professionals’ experiences of goal setting in stroke rehabilitation
Guidelines: PRISMA & ENTREQ | **Framework:** SPIDER
Quality: CASP appraisal
Synthesis: Thematic synthesis · GRADE-CERQual confidence assessment

Research question: *What are the experiences and perspectives of healthcare professionals on goal setting in stroke rehabilitation?*

Results

Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart

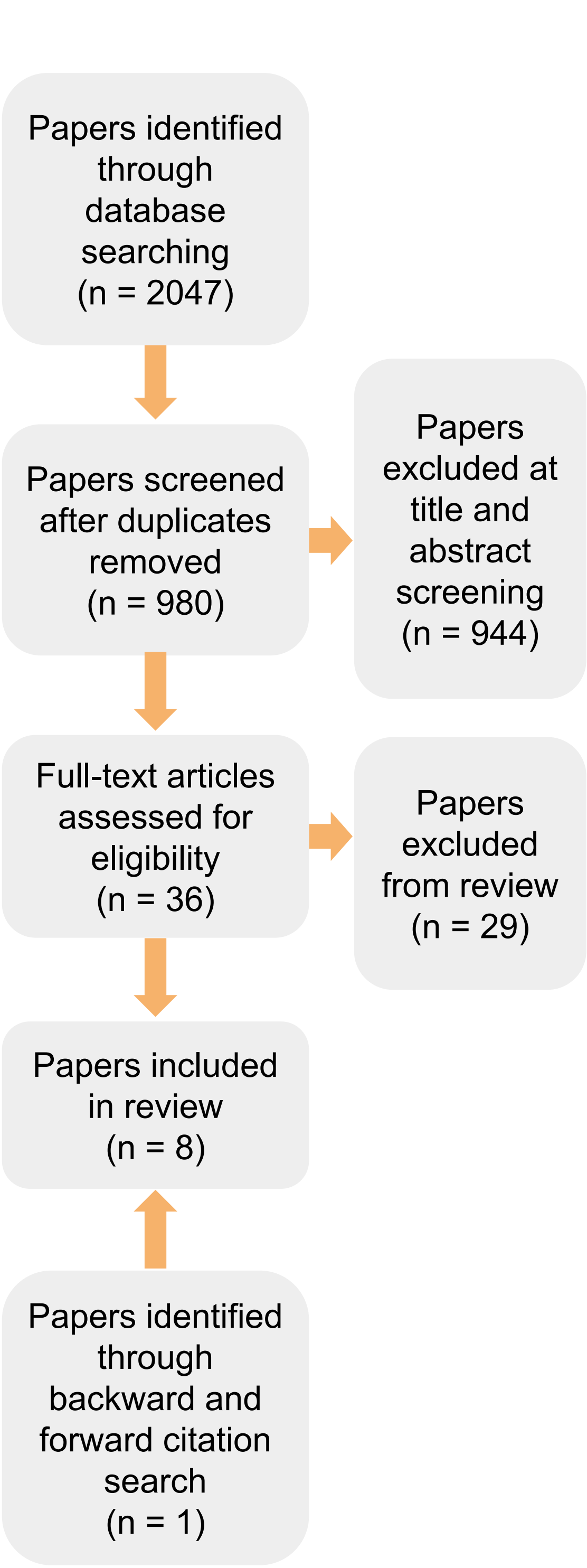
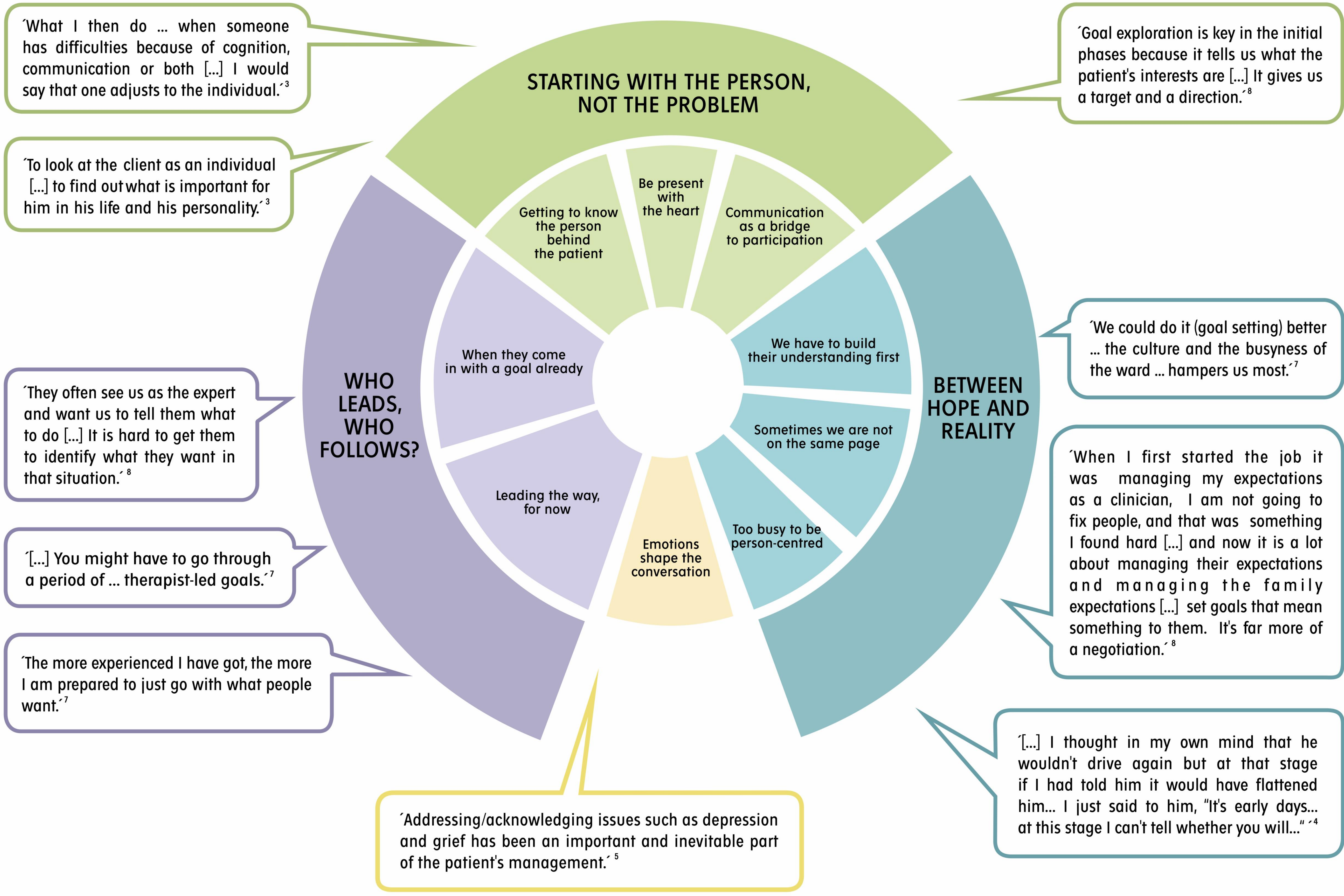


Figure 2. Analytical and descriptive themes identified through thematic synthesis¹⁰



Summary of studies

8 studies ²⁻⁹	5 countries	108 clinicians from 10 disciplines	Across acute, inpatient and community settings	Generally high CASP quality
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GRADE-CERQual assessment indicated moderate confidence in all three analytical themes.

Key clinical messages

- Meaningful goal setting is grounded in finding out who the patient is and what matters to them.
- Collaboration is not a fixed state, but a dynamic process impacted by patient capacity and preferences, clinician practice and the stage of rehabilitation.
- Time pressures, service demands and established professional practices can pull practice from person-centred goal setting.
- Future training could address these aspects of healthcare professional’s experience of goal setting, including building trust, adapting communication, facilitating engagement and navigating emotional complexity.

Publication

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