

## Developing a programme of research into nursing and stroke

Since the previous newsletter, the Stroke Collaboration have discussed and approved a number of research ideas from a programme of research into the contribution of nursing care with stroke patients and their carers. The core project, exploring nurses' and patients' perceptions of nursing care, has just received ethical approval and it is hoped that the active research phase will start soon.

The main aim of the project is to develop a Nursing Care Monitoring Tool to monitor types and instances of nursing care patient's experience on Stroke Units. The tool will most probably take the form of a simple questionnaire that can be administered by nurses during routine nursing care practice. This research project addresses a central question: What is the nature of nursing care on stroke units? The way in which the research attempts to answer this question will give further information on the broader question: What happens on a stroke unit, and how are patient outcomes improved? The rest of this article will give details of the project, outlining the background to the research and the ways in which the research will be undertaken.

### Background to the Project

The Stroke Unit Trialists' Collaboration has reported that organised inpatient stroke care, such as that provided in a stroke unit, results in long term reduction in death, dependency and the need for institutional care (Stroke Unit Trialists, 1997). The challenge now is to determine which are the important components of such 'organised care' and the Trialists' Collaboration suggested that nursing specialisation is one of the important features. However, there is little evidence available on nurses' specific contribution and the paucity of nursing research has been highlighted (O'Connor, 1993; Wolfe et al., 1996).

Difficulties in developing suitable research into the nature of the relationship between nursing care and improved outcomes for patients on stroke units (Wolfe, C, et. al., 1996) arises out of current uncertainty about the nurses' role. It is unclear whether it is mainly one of co-ordination (Waters, 1986) or whether it is a more substantial and specific contributor to the active rehabilitation of the patient (Henderson, 1980, Gibbon, 1993). This project will begin to

explore the nature of nursing care, and will do so by using a qualitative approach outlined below.

### Phase One: Interviews with patients and nurses

Nursing consists of more than simple, discrete interventions and to clarify this 'more than', this research will explore the meanings, perceptions and experiences of stroke patients and staff on the two units. These meanings and perceptions will be explored in tape-recorded in-depth interviews with patients on both units. These interviews will include questions on what nurses and patients feel nurses do, and how what nurses do helps them feel better. Analysis of the interview transcripts will identify the common themes emerging from what patients and nurses say about the nature of nursing care.

These common themes will then be translated into examples of types, or 'elements', of nursing care. These 'elements' of nursing care will then be used in the next phase of the research.

### Phase Two: Repertory Grid Interviews

Repertory Grid interviews with nursing staff and patients will be undertaken. The Repertory Grid Technique is an interviewing process using a comparative style of question-asking, and is used to generate sets of 'meanings' or 'constructs' that the interviewee holds about the subject area under discussion. These constructs are recorded in purpose-made tables, which can be used by the interviewee to 'score' the different constructs. In this way, this phase of the research will generate a structured framework of constructs of nursing care used by nursing staff and patients. (This methodology has been used extensively in psychological research and uniquely combines qualitative and quantitative research techniques (Beail, 1985). If anyone is interested in finding out more about this methodology, contact Kahryn on Leeds 233 6886).

### Phase Three: Developing the Nursing Care Monitoring Tool

The Nursing Care Monitoring Tool will be based on the framework of constructs developed in Phase Two, and would consist of a set of statement-based questions. The preliminary Tool would be taken back to focus groups with the nursing staff to check on consistency between what they had said during interview, and the questions appearing in the tool, and the language checked for ease of use. These phases of research should take nine months. The final phase

of the project will involve piloting the Tool in the clinical setting.

### Uses of this research

The lack of research into the types of care patient's experience in stroke units means the relationship between nursing care and patient outcomes remains an unexplored area. It is necessary to establish what nursing care is in order to develop a research base, which reliably establishes the relationship between instances of care and specific outcomes for patients. This project is an important foundation stone in our development of a programme of research centered on the nurses' contribution to the care of patients and their families after stroke. It will, therefore, be a keystone project in developing research into what constitutes a stroke unit, and what is the nature of the relationship between nursing and improved patient outcomes on stroke units.

### References

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## THE STROKE ASSOCIATION HOME THERAPY SERVICE

Recent research has suggested that occupational therapy in the community can significantly improve the quality of life and independence of stroke patients discharged from hospital (Gilbertson, 1999).

The Stroke Association is commemorating its centenary with a project based upon the research and has set up three "Home Therapy" teams in Sunderland, Bishop Auckland and Leeds. The Leeds team is based at Chapel Allerton Hospital and comprises one Senior Occupational Therapist and two Occupational Therapy Support Workers.

The aim of the service is to increase the independence of stroke patients and to improve their quality of life and that of their carers. It is hoped that in the long term, patients will become less dependent on home care and other community resources.

The service provides stroke patients with a goal orientated occupational therapy programme in the community for up to eight weeks. Patients are encouraged to set their own goals in the areas of personal care, domestic skills, work and/or leisure. The most commonly chosen goals include: meal preparation, laundry/ironing, dressing, shopping, using public transport, handling money and writing. More unusual goals have included repairing amplifiers, creating a herb garden and using complex radio equipment (all excellent activities for improving fine motor control and concentration!).

The project has been funded by the Stroke Association for two years; during this time an ongoing evaluation is being carried out. This includes the use of several independence and quality of life outcome measures. It is hoped that the results of the evaluation can be used to secure funding for future home Occupational Therapy services for stroke patients.

Referrals are considered for adult stroke patients of any age who would benefit from occupational therapy intervention in the community.

Referrals to the service can be made by any ward multidisciplinary team member, hospital outpatient service or social service department. To make a referral or to find out more about the service, contact any member of the team on 0113 392 4988/4523.

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The Stroke Association Home Therapy Service

### Reference

Gilbertson L. (1999) A Randomised Control Trial of Home Based Occupational Therapy for Stroke Patients. Msc (med sci), Glasgow University.

## Noticeboard

As we go to press the final touches are being added to our website. It should be available from 20/4/2000 and is to be found at;

[www.leedsstrokedatabase.net](http://www.leedsstrokedatabase.net)

The site will contain information about the Leeds Stroke Database project, links to relevant sites and in the near future will have information about the development of stroke services in Leeds and lots more. If you would like to contribute to the site in any way please get in touch – our contact addresses are on the front page.

(PS - Sorry its such a long web site address, but [www.lsd.net](http://www.lsd.net) might attract the wrong crowd!)

## LEEDS STROKE REVIEW



**Edition 12 - March 2000**

**Welcome to the latest edition of  
"Leeds Stroke Review"**

This edition features further details of the development of the stroke nursing research programme from Kahryn Hughes and an article about the Home Therapy Service by Sally Ainge.

If you would like to submit an article for the next edition of the Leeds Stroke Review please contact either Pauline Brunyee or Sheila Boyes at the address below.

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