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FREE PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE

Stroke Awareness in Care Settings

A Practical Guide for Care Staff

Knowledge Hub Resource 058

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Introduction

A stroke is a serious medical emergency that occurs when the blood supply to part of the brain is interrupted. Without an adequate supply of blood and oxygen, brain cells can become damaged, making **rapid recognition and emergency action essential**.

The effects of a stroke depend on which part of the brain is affected and can vary considerably between individuals. A stroke may affect movement, balance, speech, communication, swallowing, vision, memory, emotions and a person's ability to carry out everyday activities.

Care staff may support individuals who are recovering from or living with the longer-term effects of a previous stroke. They may also be among the first people to notice the warning signs of a new or recurrent stroke. Understanding these signs and responding immediately can help ensure the individual receives urgent medical treatment.

Why This Resource Matters

Understanding stroke awareness helps care staff to:

- Understand what a stroke is and why it is a medical emergency.
- Recognise the **FAST** warning signs of a possible stroke.
- Understand that stroke symptoms can appear suddenly.
- Know the importance of obtaining emergency medical assistance without delay.
- Recognise some of the longer-term effects a stroke may have on an individual.
- Support mobility, communication and independence appropriately.
- Be aware of possible swallowing difficulties following a stroke.
- Observe changes and report concerns promptly.
- Provide compassionate, dignified and person-centred support.

Key Message

Every minute matters when a stroke is suspected.

Care staff should know the FAST warning signs and act immediately if a stroke is suspected. Do not wait to see whether symptoms improve.

For individuals living with the effects of a previous stroke, patient and person-centred support can help promote independence, dignity, confidence and quality of life.

Recognising the Signs of a Stroke

Stroke symptoms usually begin suddenly. One of the simplest ways to recognise some of the most common warning signs is to remember **FAST**.

The FAST Test

F – Face
Has the person's face fallen or drooped on one side? Can they smile normally?

A – Arms
Can the person raise both arms and keep them there? Is one arm weak, numb or drifting downwards?

S – Speech
Is their speech slurred, confused or difficult to understand? Are they having difficulty speaking or understanding what is being said?

T – Time
If you notice any of these signs, **call 999 immediately**. Note the time the symptoms started, or when the person was last known to be well, if this is known.

Other Possible Stroke Symptoms

Not every stroke presents in exactly the same way. Other sudden symptoms may include:

- Weakness or numbness affecting one side of the body.
- Loss or blurring of vision in one or both eyes.
- Difficulty finding words or understanding other people.
- Sudden confusion.
- Dizziness, loss of balance or difficulty walking.
- A severe headache with no obvious cause.
- Difficulty swallowing.

Any sudden neurological change should be taken seriously and responded to in accordance with emergency procedures.

Supporting Someone After a Stroke

People living with the effects of a stroke may require support with:

- Mobility and maintaining independence.
- Speaking, understanding or communicating.
- Eating and drinking where swallowing has been affected.
- Personal care and everyday activities.
- Memory, concentration or problem-solving.
- Fatigue and reduced stamina.
- Emotional changes, frustration or loss of confidence.

Care staff should follow the individual's care plan and any guidance provided by relevant healthcare professionals.

Remember

Never wait to see whether suspected stroke symptoms disappear.

Even if symptoms improve or resolve after a short time, urgent medical assessment is still required because this could indicate a **transient ischaemic attack (TIA), sometimes called a mini-stroke**.

Recognise the signs, **act FAST and call 999**.

Professional Responsibilities

Care staff have an important role in both recognising a possible stroke and supporting individuals living with the effects of a previous stroke. Any **sudden change in neurological function** should be taken seriously, and suspected stroke symptoms require immediate emergency action.

As a care professional, you should always:

- Know and recognise the **FAST** warning signs of stroke.
- **Call 999 immediately** if a stroke is suspected.
- Note when symptoms started, or when the individual was last known to be well, if this information is available.
- Follow the individual's care plan and organisational emergency procedures.
- Never give food, drink or oral medication to someone with a suspected acute stroke unless instructed by an appropriate healthcare professional, because swallowing may be affected.
- Observe and report changes in mobility, communication, swallowing, vision, cognition or behaviour.
- Follow any agreed mobility, falls-prevention and swallowing guidance.
- Encourage independence and allow sufficient time for everyday activities.
- Record relevant observations and actions accurately.
- Work within the limits of your role, training and competence.

When to Take Emergency Action

Call 999 immediately if an individual suddenly develops:

- Facial weakness or drooping.
- Weakness or numbness in an arm, leg or one side of the body.
- Slurred, confused or significantly altered speech.
- Difficulty understanding or communicating.
- Sudden loss or significant change in vision.
- Severe dizziness, loss of balance or difficulty walking.
- A sudden severe headache with no obvious cause.
- Any other sudden neurological symptoms that could indicate a stroke.

Do not wait for several symptoms to appear. **One FAST symptom can be enough to suspect a stroke and seek emergency help.**

Supporting Longer-Term Recovery

Following a stroke, an individual's abilities and support needs may change. Care staff should work in accordance with the person's care plan and guidance from relevant healthcare professionals.

Good support may include:

- Allowing additional time for communication and everyday activities.
- Encouraging the individual to do as much as safely possible for themselves.
- Following prescribed eating, drinking and swallowing recommendations.
- Supporting safe mobility and the correct use of agreed equipment.
- Recognising fatigue and allowing appropriate rest.
- Providing reassurance and respecting changes in confidence, mood or emotional wellbeing.

Good Practice Reminder

When a stroke is suspected, **speed is critical — act FAST and call 999**.

For individuals living with the longer-term effects of stroke, recovery and abilities vary considerably. Patient, consistent and person-centred support can help promote independence, dignity, confidence and quality of life.

Summary

A stroke is a medical emergency caused by an interruption to the blood supply to part of the brain. Recognising the warning signs quickly and obtaining emergency medical assistance can be critical to reducing the risk of serious disability or death.

Care staff should remember the **FAST** test and act immediately if a stroke is suspected. Staff also play an important role in supporting individuals living with the longer-term effects of stroke by promoting independence, following individual care plans and recognising changes in mobility, communication, swallowing and general wellbeing.

Stroke Awareness Checklist

✓ Remember **FAST – Face, Arms, Speech, Time**.

✓ **Call 999 immediately** if a stroke is suspected.

✓ Note when symptoms started or when the individual was last known to be well, if known.

✓ Never wait to see whether suspected stroke symptoms improve.

✓ Follow the individual's care plan and organisational emergency procedures.

✓ Be aware that swallowing, communication, mobility and cognition may be affected following a stroke.

✓ Follow any agreed eating, drinking, mobility and falls-prevention guidance.

✓ Encourage independence and allow sufficient time for everyday activities.

✓ Record relevant observations and actions accurately.

✓ Report changes in the individual's condition promptly.

Further Information

For further guidance on stroke, visit:

NHS – Stroke
https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stroke/

Stroke Association
https://www.stroke.org.uk

NICE – Stroke and Transient Ischaemic Attack
https://www.nice.org.uk

Care Quality Commission (CQC)
https://www.cqc.org.uk

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