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Detection and intervention of health problems after stroke – a nurse-led follow-up program

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Introduction: Secondary prevention among stroke survivors has been reported to be neglected. This randomised controlled trial examines whether a structured nurse-led follow-up program three months after stroke improves health status one year after stroke.

Method: During one year, all survivors one month after stroke from a university hospital in Malmö, Sweden, were approached for participation. Those consenting were randomised to intervention group with structured follow-up at three months or to standard care (control group) (mean age 73.8/73.7 years). Three months after stroke, a nurse specialist (NS) followed up the intervention group regarding risk factors and health problems after stroke. The NS sent urgent health problems immediately to a stroke clinician; otherwise patients were referred to a GP for non-urgent or rehabilitative interventions. Patients were informed about stroke and life style factors.

Depression/anxiety was assessed by patient self-report with the EQ-5D scale.

Results: After three months, 80% of the intervention group (n=194) needed 1-4 interventions compared with 63% (p<0.001) in the same group after one year, and 74% in the control group (n=197) (p=0.022) after one year, and only 40% in the intervention group experienced depression/anxiety compared with 52% in the control group (p=0.042).

Conclusions: A nurse-led follow-up three months after stroke resulted in reduced need for interventions and lower prevalence of self-reported depression/anxiety one year after stroke compared to standard care. The follow-up program may be further enhanced by collaboration between a NS and a stroke clinician at the outpatient clinic regarding all medical interventions, before referring patients to the GP for continued follow-up.