



Briefing to Northern Ireland Affairs Committee: Stroke services

How speech and language therapy supports stroke patients

- In Northern Ireland 4,000 people have a stroke each year¹; it is the third biggest cause of death in Northern Ireland². Speech and language therapy is vital to help stroke survivors with both their immediate and long-term recovery from stroke.
- A third of stroke survivors will have some level of communication difficulties following a stroke³ and between 40 – 78% will initially experience some level of difficulty in swallowing (dysphagia)⁴. 76% of those initially affected will continue to have a moderate to severe difficulties while 15% will live with a profound dysphagia⁵.
- SLT is an effective intervention for supporting people with communication and swallowing difficulties:
 - Speech and language therapists (SLTs) are uniquely qualified to assess an individual's ability to understand and to communicate that understanding to optimise a person's choice, degree of control and capacity to consent to treatment and care.
 - Dysphagia can be managed by SLTs as they support individuals to eat and drink safely and train others. If it is not managed, dysphagia results in malnutrition and dehydration and is a major factor in repeated chest infections, choking risk and pneumonia which are linked to avoidable hospital admissions and in some cases death.

The economic benefit of providing speech and language therapy support for stroke survivors

Social return on investment research estimates that:

- Every £1 invested in low intensity speech and language therapy for adults with communication difficulties post stroke generates £1.30 due to the monetary benefit associated with quality of life gain⁶.
- Each £1 invested in low intensity speech and language therapy for adults with dysphagia after stroke generates £2.30 in healthcare cost savings through cases of avoided chest infections⁷.

Issues of access to SLT for stroke survivors in NI

¹ Stroke Association (2015). State of the Nation, Stroke Statistics, Stroke Association NI

² Stroke Association (2018) State of the Nation, Stroke Statistics

https://www.stroke.org.uk/system/files/sotn_2018.pdf

³ Stroke Association (2012) Speech and Language Therapy after Stroke. Stroke Association. London.

⁴ Martino R, et al. Dysphagia after stroke: Incidence, diagnosis, and pulmonary complications. Stroke 2005; 36:12, 2756-2763.

⁵ Mann G, Hankey G, Cameron D. Swallowing function after stroke prognosis and prognostic factors at 6 months. Stroke 1999; 30, 744-748

⁶ Marsh K, et al (2010) An economic evaluation of speech and language therapy, Matrix Evidence, p75.

http://www.rcslt.org/giving_voice/matrix_report

⁷ Ibid

- The case for reforming stroke services in NI is well documented^{8 9} in order to address inconsistencies in access to specialised stroke services and aftercare, and access to vital, continued support in the community, including speech and language therapy.
- A snapshot survey of stroke survivors that was commissioned by RCSLT NI in partnership with the Stroke Association in 2017 revealed that 90% of stroke survivors believe that communication difficulties following their stroke have impacted hugely on their lives and that less people are now receiving speech and language therapy after a stroke than in 2008.
- A third of respondents felt that the amount of SLT they received was too little with some reporting having received no provision at all¹⁰.
- In June 2017, HSC launched a pre-consultation on plans to improve how stroke services are delivered in Northern Ireland, with the aim of ensuring that all people affected by stroke get the right care and support, in the right place and at the right time. RCSLT NI valued the opportunity to engage with the 'Reshaping Stroke Services' pre-consultation, but 18 months have now passed and we have seen no progress on the consultation.

RCSLT are calling for:

- RCSLT NI, along with the Stroke Association, are calling for a 'communication lifeline' to be given to all stroke patients in NI. SLT should form a core part of stroke aftercare to ensure that stroke survivors have their communication assessed within 72 hours so that they can be given a means of communicating even at a basic level. We would also urge commissioners to ensure that the provision of specialist speech and language therapy is available throughout Northern Ireland.
- RCSLT NI supports the Stroke Association's call for the immediate publication of a public consultation on reshaping stroke services so that we can progress work to provide first-class services for those affected by stroke in Northern Ireland.

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⁸ The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) NI, 2017, 'Reshaping Stroke Services' pre-consultation document available at http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/download/Consultations/reshaping_stroke_services_in_ni_pre-consultation_-_june_2017/Reshaping-Stroke-Services-in-NI-Pre-consultation-Document.pdf

⁹ The Regulation and Quality Improvement (RQIA), 2014, 'Review of Stroke Services in Northern Ireland' available at <https://www.rqia.org.uk/RQIA/files/b8/b8f067de-3bf7-40c6-9297-b21a41a31811.pdf>

¹⁰ RCSLT NI Survey 'Communication Needs following Stroke' 2017 available at <https://www.rcslt.org/policy/northern-ireland#section-4>