

Life after stroke: Peer support program:

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Background: Stroke survivors who have successfully reengaged in meaningful life activities may be the best source for providing support to those who have not. 1 in 6 people will be diagnosed with a stroke in their lifetime. Many stroke survivors experience depression or anxiety, social isolation and considerable dislocation in their lives. The aim of this pilot project was to improve quality of life after stroke by connecting stroke survivors with an individual peer supporter in inner east Melbourne. Studies have shown that peer support may be helpful in decreasing feelings of isolation and overcoming depression, factors leading to increased mortality in stroke survivors. Currently there are no individual stroke peer support programs for stroke survivors in Victoria.

Methods: 8 stroke survivors and 2 family members were trained to provide individual emotional and informational peer support. These volunteers were matched to recent stroke survivors for 4-6 months and met fortnightly. Data has been collected at baseline on demographics, health information, pre-stroke participation, current participation and a variety of quantitative measures to assessing quality of life, depression and anxiety, physical function, and goal attainment. The same data will be collected at mid-point (July) and end of implementation (September). Questionnaires and focus groups will also be utilised to evaluate the volunteer training and peer program.

Results: Outcomes will be presented on change from baseline to end of implementation on quality of life, depression and anxiety, participation and goal attainment. Preliminary qualitative data from questionnaires and focus groups will also be described.

Discussion: Stroke survivors can be trained to provide 1:1 peer support. Matched 1:1 peer support is effective in encouraging stroke survivors through a shared lived experience and in engaging them in meaningful life activities. This presentation will detail the results available from the program evaluation and address opportunities for program transferability.

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