



**“Back in the usual normal world”  
Barriers and enablers to exercise and  
community participation after stroke:  
the role of community health and  
support services**



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**AIM**

To describe stroke survivors and carers experiences of services after discharge and explore the role of these services as an enabler or barrier to exercise and community participation.

**METHOD**

A qualitative methodology employing a post positivist framework was utilised. Semi structured in depth interviews and a focus group were conducted with fourteen stroke survivors and two carers. Key themes were derived from interpretive analysis of transcripts by two independent researchers.

**RESULTS**

Four main themes characterised participant’s experiences of services after stroke. “*I suppose it depends who you are dealing with*” - the lucky dip of service provision, “*Getting back to the usual normal world*” - enablers to exercise and participation, “*We’re all in the same boat*” - the benefits of group interaction and “*There’s obviously no coordination*”- barriers on the long road to recovery. Case management or coordination was perceived as an important component of a stroke service and related to improved access to services. Community based rehabilitation programs were associated with positive experiences of services. They provided benefits in terms of practical assistance, opportunities for getting out in the community, carer support and general satisfaction. They positively influenced feelings of self efficacy, independence and social integration. Exercise opportunities after stroke were highly valued by participants. There were many social and motivational benefits derived from being in a group environment with other stroke survivors. A younger age at time of stroke was a significant barrier to accessing services.

**CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

The experience of stroke survivors demonstrates that community health and support services can enable exercise and community participation after stroke. However their experiences highlight that there are a number of barriers to accessing these services. Stroke survivors identify coordination or case management and increased opportunities for exercise and community based rehabilitation programs as key ingredients of a long term support model for stroke. Service providers should consider interventions that increase opportunities for social and community participation. The provision of encouragement, information, transport facilitation and accompanied outings are strategies that might enhance exercise and community participation after stroke. Early referral after discharge to stroke specific exercise groups led by health professionals is a potential strategy for increasing exercise participation in this population.

*For the full report on this project visit our website, follow the link to the Rural Research Capacity Building Program and click on ‘view completed projects’*

Amanda is a physiotherapist currently working at Grafton Base Hospital. Amanda has a background and interest in rehabilitation and stroke recovery.



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