

Many stroke patients not receiving emergency treatment quickly enough

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(Medical Xpress)—Many people do not recognise the signs of stroke and delay calling emergency services, limiting their chances of getting effective early treatment, a new study has revealed. Even those who think they are having a stroke often do not act fast enough.

Every year an estimated 150,000 people in the UK suffer a stroke, about one every 5 minutes. Recent research has found that if people with stroke are treated with clot busting drugs within the first few hours, they are much more likely to make a complete recovery.

Half of all [patients](#) fully or almost fully recover if they are treated within the first four and a half hours and the sooner they are treated the better the outcomes.

Now, a paper published in *PLOS One* has revealed that many patients delay calling the emergency services. The researchers interviewed

patients and witnesses who made the initial call for help to try to find out the reasons for these delays.

Sometimes this is because they don't recognise the symptoms, but often it can be due to fear and denial, or not wanting to burden others or to 'make a fuss' by calling 999. Contacting their family, friends or GP first also delayed them getting to hospital for treatment.

Some of those interviewed at three acute stroke units in the North East had some knowledge of stroke through television adverts or soap operas. The widely publicised Act FAST campaign had raised awareness of stroke in some patients but this did not necessarily increase their sense of urgency, particularly if they experienced symptoms different from those highlighted in the campaign.

Lead author of the paper, Martin White, Professor of [Public Health](#) at Newcastle University and director of Fuse, said: "More needs to be done to raise awareness of [stroke symptoms](#). People need to know that you may get some or all of the symptoms, and maybe not in the same order. If you suspect yourself or someone else is having a stroke you should call 999 straight away, so life saving treatment can be given."

Co-researcher Joan Mackintosh, Research Associate at Newcastle University, said: "Every minute counts and delayed treatment means patients are more likely to lose their independence, with consequences for themselves and their carers.

"Even a slight delay, for example calling your GP instead of calling the emergency services straight away, can have a big effect. The message has to be, dial 999 if any of the symptoms of a stroke appear, even if it's not all of them."

The symptoms highlighted in the Act FAST campaign were: drooping of

one side of the face; inability to raise one or both arms and keep them there; or speech problems. One or more of these symptoms is present in nine out of ten strokes.

The study suggests that strategies should be employed to further raise awareness of the need for an emergency response to stroke and should particularly target existing stroke patients and those 'at risk'.

One of the patients involved in the study was 71 year old Frank Billham, of Wideopen, Tyne and Wear. The ex-police officer suffered a [stroke](#) three years ago, but thanks to the swift action of his wife and the [emergency services](#) he has made almost a complete recovery.

Frank said: "I didn't know what was happening, my arm and face started to feel tingly, but I just ignored it, I thought it would go away. And then I just flopped over.

"My wife found me and thought I was asleep but when she tried to rouse me I was slurring my words and not moving properly. Fortunately she called an ambulance and I got treatment within a couple of hours."

That fast action made all the difference and Frank has recovered so well that he is now once again enjoying bike rides, walks and even playing table tennis and gardening.

He added: "It has been an amazing recovery, I can live an almost normal life now thanks to my wife and the people who treated me. I would just say to anyone get immediate help, I dread to think what my quality of life would have been like if I hadn't got help so quickly."

Provided by Newcastle University

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