

Unmet needs for medicines support: A greater role for community pharmacists in the care of stroke survivors?

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What was the problem?

Research shows that nearly 6 out of 10 stroke survivors do not take their medicines as prescribed by their Doctor. This means the stroke survivor has an increased risk of experiencing a further stroke.

We know that people do not take their medicines for a number of reasons. Sometimes this is related to their concerns about side effects of the medicines, sometimes because they are not confident that the medicine will work for them. Sometimes practical issues, such as not being able to swallow the medicine or take it out of its container are the reason, and these types of issues can be addressed by a pharmacist. Community pharmacists (chemists) may be ideally placed to support patients with their medicine-taking long-term.

Aim:

This research aimed to investigate stroke survivors’ medicine support needs and their relationships with pharmacy services.

What did we do?

A researcher met with 15 stroke survivors recruited from local stroke support groups.

In individual interviews, which lasted on average 45 minutes, stroke survivors’ experiences with their medicines and community pharmacy services were explored.

The interviews were recorded and analysed.

What did we find?

A number of unmet medicine needs were identified in the interviews (see panel below). Some people had several concerns about their medicines. The **physical** and **mental** difficulties that frequently follow a stroke led to many of the problems experienced but also meant that half of those interviewed were unable to get to their community pharmacy. Some relied on support from carers to visit, whereas others could not visit their pharmacy at all, and therefore did not see their pharmacist. However, for those who did, community pharmacists had helped to resolve many of their medicine problems.

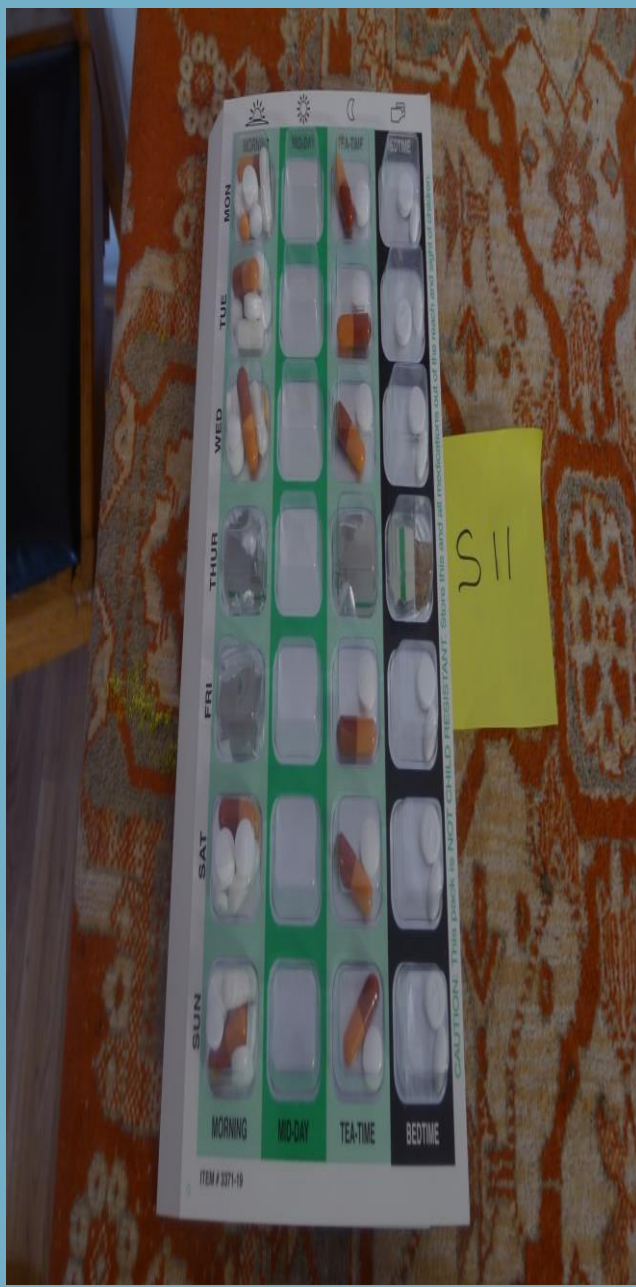
“Those ones where you push them out...I have great difficulty doing that. Sometimes I get half a pill, sometimes I get no pill, sometimes the pill shoots over the other side of the room... **and those bloody, excuse me, those push down the lid and turn (containers)!**”  
male, age 65, 16 years post stroke, collects medicines in person

“It’s only when I start to run out **I get panicky and think oh god must get some more tablets**”  
female, age 86, 9 years post stroke, pharmacy delivers

“I couldn’t **swallow** it (the medicine), it would stick in my throat and make me choke”  
female, age 91, 2 years post stroke, pharmacy delivers medicines

“My hand is stuck now...**I find it difficult with blister packs** to do it with one hand, push the thing in and get the tablet out...some of them are so hard to undo”  
female, age 86years, 9 years post stroke, pharmacy delivers

“**The pharmacist is quite close ..if somebody could take me there or get me there**”  
female, age 91, 2 years post stroke, pharmacy delivers medicines



“I’ve gone in to panic because I couldn’t find the right tablets, **because it wasn’t programmed in my head**”  
female, age 68, 6 years post stroke, pharmacy delivers medicines

“There is a leaflet in here...I expect it would tell me what it (medicine) does....I could even read that but that would confuse me **anyway...it gets muddled up inside me**”  
female, age 48, 10years post stroke, collects medicines in person

“I can put them (medicines) in the little jar, in the glass, put the water on there and leave it for a little **while...then I’d completely forget** ...there’s been odd occasions when I’ve taken the tablets and then about an hour later thinking, well, did I take them, didn’t I take them?”  
female, age 68, 6 years post stroke, pharmacy delivers medicines

“**The doctor wanted to give me depression tablets and I didn’t want them...he** (community pharmacist) **told me all the options and I thought it through and that’s what I wanted to do**”  
female, age 67, 11years post stroke, pharmacy delivers medicines

“It’s affected my vision...sometimes **you can’t always read them** (medicine instructions ) properly because your eyes are a bit waxy”  
female, age 68, 6 years post stroke, pharmacy delivers medicines

Pictures above show some of the aids patients in this study used to remind them to take their medicines

What this means

Medicine-related problems are going unrecognised and risking stroke survivor’s health. Community pharmacists could help, but home-based pharmacy support will be needed for those unable to access a pharmacy.

Acknowledgements

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