Stroke Units: update of HTA report "Assessment of stroke units as medical technology"

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BACKGROUND
Strokes are the third leading cause of death in Germany: There are over 40,000 patients who experience a stroke each year (in 2001: 40,600 patients). Elderly people have a higher risk to suffer a stroke. Looking at the demographic facts, the number of patients with strokes is likely to increase in the next years. Rehabilitation offers the opportunity to reduce the burden of disabilities after strokes, as shown in stroke units in Great Britain.

OBJECTIVES
The main objective of this report is the comparison of the outcome of stroke unit patients compared with stroke patients who are treated in general units. Besides, the components of treatment that lead to the best outcome are investigated.

METHODS
Published literature up to 2002 is identified by searching in the following databases: PSYCINFO, PSYNDEX, EMBASE, EMBASE Alert, Int. Health Technology Assessment, MEDLINE, MEDLINE ALERT, SCISEARCH, SOCIAL SCISEARCH, GEROLIT, Heclinet, AMED, Biosis Prev AB, Biotechnology, Elsevier Biobase, Ethmed, Euroethics, SOMED to update Volume 15 of the HTA series of DIMDI “The evaluation of stroke units as medical technology” by Fritze (2000).

RESULTS
From 1,682 citation titles and abstracts examined, 62 articles are retrieved for full-text review. Four metaanalyses, two HTA reports and three guidelines meet the inclusion criteria.

DISCUSSION
The methodological quality of the articles varies but is on average moderate to good. Most of these trials are undertaken in Scandinavia and the United Kingdom. No German study meets the inclusion criteria.

CONCLUSION
Stroke patients who receive organised inpatient care in a stroke unit with early physiotherapy are more likely to be alive, independent and living at home after a stroke. These findings can be transferred to German settings. The profit of stroke unit patients seems to be a result of the early physiotherapy, the specifically trained team in stroke units, and the concept of including patients and their relatives. To allow stronger conclusions about the clinical efficacy and the cost-effectiveness of stroke units, as well as the patients’ quality of life, further research is required, particularly in a German setting.

All HTA reports are available for free as full texts in the DAHTA database (only in German). (www.dimdi.de – HTA)

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