DVD

How to cope with stroke, by those who do

At just 50 years of age, I had a blood clot in the brainstem. Previously healthy, working full time and living an active life, overnight I found myself lying in a hospital bed and paralysed down my left side. I was unable to see, write, read, or speak properly, and unable to swallow, sit, stand, or control my bladder or bowels. I had heard of stroke but had no idea of the implications—I thought that after a couple of weeks I would be back to normal. Little did I know it would mean more than 3 months in hospital and wheelchair-based family care for some time thereafter. Now, 5 years after my stroke, I still have disabilities but, thanks to professional treatment and family support, I am independent.

Stroke Prevention and Recovery: The Ultimate Video Guide is a set of 3 DVDs that aims to provide stroke patients, their families, and caregivers with a complete overview of stroke, from avoidance and aftermath to education and rehabilitation. The DVDs are presented by stroke survivors and caregivers in addition to medical experts, and in my opinion they are excellent. Access to these DVDs in hospital and afterwards would have reduced my feelings of isolation and helped me to come to terms with my stroke sooner. To see and hear people of different age, sex, and race talk of their experience of stroke is invaluable, even 5 years on.

I remember lying in hospital wondering whether I would ever walk, read, or write again. It is difficult for doctors to answer such questions, but seeing how some of the people on the DVD had recovered would have given me hope and determination. Although it is important to hear from medical staff about helping oneself, seeing those who have had a stroke was poignant and encouraging.

The survivors talk about their feelings at the time of stroke, their thoughts on why the stroke happened, the effects on their physical and emotional functioning, and their rehabilitation. They also explain the process of recovery, and what one can expect from which medical staff. The way in which each individual has been interviewed—carefully and professionally, taking emotions and feelings into account—is extremely interesting, valuable, and easy to watch. The interviews are not rushed, giving patients time to understand and absorb the information, and reflect on how it relates to their own circumstances.

DVDs are a particularly useful format for stroke patients because they are accessible to those who have lost their reading ability and they can be played repeatedly. This is invaluable for patients who have short-term memory loss, concentration, and emotional problems. The DVDs answer many of the questions that stroke patients ask medical professionals, such as what different types of stroke there are, how the brain functions after stroke, why the symptoms of stroke occur, and how another stroke might be avoided. Giving patients access to the DVDs would reduce their embarrassment at asking the same questions from one week to the next, knowing they had asked them before but forgotten the answers; it would also reduce time spent by health-care professionals on outpatient appointments.

In my opinion, watching these DVDs would also be important for family and friends. My family found it distressing not knowing how to help me, and I could give them little information; these DVDs could help relatives to understand their loved one’s condition and what part they could play in rehabilitation.

The information on rehabilitation options is particularly valuable. For example, functional electrical stimulation (FES) now enables me to walk more efficiently and for longer distances without falling; it has improved my control of balance, leading to independence and a better quality of life. However, I was only given the opportunity to use it 18 months after my stroke—it would have been immensely helpful to know about it sooner from these DVDs. The DVDs also provide information on the benefits of exercise; having run an exercise programme for stroke survivors for 3 years, I am keenly aware that regular physiotherapy exercises can increase wellbeing, physical strength, mobility, and independence, and these DVDs could prove useful in encouraging survivors to do more exercise.

A physiotherapist who watched the DVD on home care and rehabilitation found most of the exercises and movements to be well demonstrated. Overall she felt that this DVD was “a useful addition to advice and education provided by health professionals”. A doctor commented that Understanding Strokes: Experts’ Advice gave information that was “very good”, if “rather dry”. Another medical professional also found the information useful, although she was distracted by the accents: because the DVDs were made in New Zealand, it was difficult to understand some of the individuals, especially those who also had speech problems after their strokes. This is my only complaint about this set: I would very much like someone to make similar DVDs in England. I would also welcome a DVD on a proper physiotherapy exercise programme. Hospital staff provide useful information, but it would be helpful for patients, family, and friends to have it on DVD as a constant reminder.

Overall, this DVD set provides invaluable knowledge about stroke in an accessible format. The information from both patients and health-care professionals on the medical aspects of stroke and what is available to aid recovery is important and these DVDs should be available to those who need them.

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