Work and stroke
'Thinking about returning to my job made me focus on getting better. It gave me a goal to work towards.'

Stroke among working age people is rising and while improvements in acute care mean more people are surviving and making good recoveries, for many people life after stroke is a challenge. While work is not always possible after a stroke, for many people getting back to work is a central part of their recovery.

Equality legislation has increased aspirations and opportunities for people with disabilities to work, and people tell us that returning to their job or finding work after stroke is very important to them. However we know that many people struggle to keep their job or find a new one after their stroke.

‘When I look back, I believe that I went back to work initially to prove to everyone that I was OK – including myself.’

We wanted to find out more about the problems stroke survivors face when trying to stay in work or find new jobs. We also wanted to know why employers might be reluctant to employ people who have had a stroke, and what they think would help. To do this we asked 350 people of working age about their experiences of work after stroke. We also asked 500 owners and managers in small and medium sized businesses across the UK about their understanding of stroke and their attitudes to employing stroke survivors.

3 Labour Force Survey, Quarter 2, 2012
‘I wanted to go back full time, I just needed a bit more time.’

We asked stroke survivors why they wanted to return to work after their stroke:

- 26% said it was a sign they were getting back to normal
- 23% said they were worried about money
- 20% said it was because they had always worked
- 14% said they thought that it would be good for them psychologically.

We asked about their attitudes to work:

- 74% said work was very important to their recovery
- 57% said the work they could do after their stroke was very different to the work they did before their stroke
- 67% said their attitude to work changed after their stroke
- 92% felt their prospects had been affected by their stroke

We asked about their employers:

- 51% felt they could talk to their employer about their stroke and its impact
- 53% said their employer didn’t understand the impact of their stroke
- 65% said their employer was understanding and sympathetic when they had their stroke
- 38% agreed that their employer ‘didn’t want to know’.

‘Of the survivors who are currently looking for work more than three quarters (76%) told us they don’t have the support and advice they need to help them find work.’

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What employers told us

Employers knew some of the symptoms people recovering from a stroke might experience:

- 61% were aware of speaking difficulties, slurred speech or problems using language (called aphasia)
- 39% said partial paralysis affecting arm, leg or one side of the body
- 36% said problems with movement, co-ordination, balance or mobility
- 20% mentioned facial paralysis
- 7% said confusion or cognitive difficulties
- 1% said fatigue.

We asked what would make them more likely to employ someone after a stroke:

- 30% said that a better understanding of stroke and the disabilities it causes
- 28% said grants to help pay for special equipment and adaptations
- 23% said work place assessments and advice on how to accommodate the needs of a disabled employee
- 19% said independent advice on how to accommodate the needs of a disabled employee
- 17% said support and advice when someone first goes on sick leave.

We asked why employers may be reluctant to employ people who had previously had a stroke:

- 42% thought they may be concerned about the risk of another stroke
- 42% thought they may be concerned about the stroke survivors ability to carry out the role
- 12% thought they may be worried that a stroke survivor might need time off work because of health related issues
- 6% thought they may be worried about legal liabilities such as extra insurance costs or being blamed for causing a subsequent stroke.

25% of stroke survivors experience extreme tiredness, known as post-stroke fatigue. Yet in our survey only 1% of employers were aware of fatigue as an impact of stroke.

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Key messages on stroke and work

With the right care, support and advice many people can return to work after a stroke. Whether they are able to return to work and how long it takes will depend on the effects of their stroke, the care and support they received, what work they were doing before and the amount of support their employer gives them.

Employers have a legal responsibility to do all they can to ensure that a stroke does not stop someone from keeping their job or having the same rights and access to opportunities that they had before.

Our survey found that the majority of employers are aware of the visible and physical effects of stroke. They are substantially less aware about the hidden impacts of stroke such as memory problems, cognitive difficulties and fatigue.

Both stroke survivors and employers believe that if employers had a better understanding of stroke and the disabilities it causes, it would help people keep their job or find work after a stroke.

Employers are often worried about the likelihood of an employee having another stroke. While it is true that when someone has had a stroke their risk of having another is increased, the greatest risk of having another stroke is in the first 30 days. Understanding what factors contributed to the stroke and addressing them whenever possible, will help reduce the risk.

“There is a lot of rhetoric spouted about helping people with disabilities to find work, but in reality little support is available, even less to enable disabled people to remain in work.’

Kate Pieroudis, Back to Work Project Manager, talks about some of the challenges people face after a stroke and what would support them back to work.

‘Some people return to the job they were doing before their stroke but for others their role might change or they have to find new work. Some may re-train and for many volunteering is a great stepping stone as it offers a chance to re-build confidence and develop new skills.

Many people want to go back to work to regain a sense of control. When difficulties arise it can be a challenge to discuss these with an employer as they are worried they may lose their job. This is made worse if the employer hasn’t received any information on the effects of stroke.

We have created a guide for employers which summarises the effects of stroke, how it can impact on people in the workplace and what employers can do to support someone back to work after a stroke.’

Download the guide from our website stroke.org.uk and share it with employers.

Our Back to Work Project is an example of vocational rehabilitation (VR). VR has been defined as whatever helps someone with a health problem return to, and remain in, work. UK Government policy and clinical guidelines say that VR should be provided, and keeping people with long term conditions in work is a recognised NHS health outcome. However access to VR services is patchy. In a survey of support available after stroke, the Care Quality Commission found that only 37% of areas provided services focussed on assisting a return to work.

7 Care Quality Commission, Supporting Life After Stroke, 2011
How the Stroke Association can help

Information available from stroke.org.uk

Stroke in people of working age:
A fact sheet for people of working age affected by stroke including advice on relationships and getting back to work.

The complete guide to stroke for employers:
This guide summarises the effects of stroke and how it can impact on employees and what employers can do to support a stroke survivor back to work.

Stroke helpline and information service
Call our stroke helpline on 0303 3033 100 or email info@stroke.org.uk for information and guidance on all aspects of stroke including getting back to work after a stroke.

Online discussion forum
This is an area of stroke.org.uk where people affected by stroke can share their experiences and support one another.

Life After Stroke Services
Every year we support around 70,000 stroke survivors in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to make the best possible recovery from stroke. Our Life After Stroke Services range from emotional and practical support to improving communication skills after a stroke or exercise based rehabilitation. In Scotland we provide support through our information services and special initiatives. For information about services that may be available in your area ring the stroke helpline and information service on 0303 3033 100 or visit stroke.org.uk/support.

The Back to Work Service in London provides support and guidance for stroke survivors to return to existing work after a stroke or to access new opportunities, further training or volunteering. We run workshops on topics like Mindfulness and Confidence Building and work with employers to give advice and guidance on how best to support stroke survivors in the workplace. For more information on the Back to Work Service in London call 0207 940 1353 or stroke.org.uk/support.

The Community Integration Service in North East England, run by Momentum Training and The Stroke Association, helps people re-engage in social activities, attend training or return to work after a stroke. Ring 0191 487 9988 or email CommunityIntegrationService-SouthofTyne@stroke.org.uk

Support for your business
Contact our training team on 01527 903 911 or stroketraining@stroke.org.uk to find out about our stroke awareness training.
We are the Stroke Association

We believe in life after stroke. That’s why we support stroke survivors to make the best recovery they can. It’s why we campaign for better stroke care. And it’s why we fund research to develop new treatments and ways of preventing stroke.

We’re with you every step of the way, together we can conquer stroke.

Stroke Helpline: 0303 3033 100
Website: stroke.org.uk
Email: info@stroke.org.uk
From a textphone: 18001 0303 3033 100

We are a charity and we rely on your support to change the lives of people affected by stroke and reduce the number of people who are struck down by this devastating disease.

Please help us to make a difference today.

Get involved at:
stroke.org.uk/supporters-network-signup or
#workandstroke

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Twitter @TheStrokeAssoc

Together we can conquer stroke

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