

Stroke Survivor and Caregiver Perspectives on Seeking Care: A Qualitative Study

INTRODUCTION

- Critical first step in acute stroke care continuum = **early recognition + activation of emergency medical services (EMS)**

OBJECTIVE

- Identify **challenges in early initiation of EMS** among adult stroke survivors and caregivers in North Carolina, a “stroke belt” state

METHODS

- Semi-structured interviews** were conducted May-Dec. 2024 by Zoom & in-person
- Topics: stroke context, response behaviors to signs/symptoms, & any concerns of seeking help
- Content analysis** to identify key variables of **care-seeking behaviors**

RESULTS

- 42 interviews on 34 stroke events
- 60% stroke survivor, 40% caregiver
- 50% female; 12% Black, Non-Hispanic; 31% rural

Authors: Lindsay Stewart¹, Emma Johnson¹, Mahesh Pinapaka¹, Selena Long¹, Edward Jauch², Jane Brice¹, Mehul D. Patel¹
¹University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, ²UNC Health Sciences at MAHEC, Asheville, North Carolina

Disclosures: None; Research support: National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (R01MD018031); We also thank study participants for their invaluable contributions.

Table. Care-Seeking Behaviors & Perspectives		
	Time delay to seeking care*, No. events (%)	
	Immediate Response: 21 events	Delayed Response: 13 events
Survivor alone at onset	0 events (0)	5 events (38)
Stroke Recognition	Recognized/suspected – 15 events (71)	Unsure/thought low severity – 9 events (69)
Person that initiated care-seeking	Known bystander – 18 events (86) Self in 2 events (10)	Known bystander – 9 events (69) Self in 3 events (23)
First to be contacted	9-1-1/EMS – 11 events (52) No call made – 3 events (14)	9-1-1/EMS – 6 events (46) No call made – 6 events (46)
EMS was utilized	18 events (86)	8 events (62)

*Defined as time from sign/symptom onset to contacting a medical professional (physician, nurse, paramedic, emergency personnel). Immediate response defined as <1.5 hr. Delayed response defined as >6 hrs.

Stroke recognition and social connections are facilitators to prompt care-seeking

ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTES



"I don't hesitate to call for support ...I'd be concerned about ...getting care to him as quickly."

"He was—both cases, he was very receptive to seeking the care."

"...it was just so clear and so dramatic that it didn't matter at that point what the cost was."

"We have never...called the ambulance lightly...[the issue] didn't seem ambulance worthy"

"It's always difficult to determine if you have really mild symptoms...I didn't want to be the boy who cried wolf."

"You're always thinking about bills and stuff and I'm like, I don't wanna pay an ambulance bill when I can walk into the hospital by myself."

-Survivor
 -Caregiver