Too many stroke patients not attending therapy

SINGAPORE — Experts in Singapore have said they are worried about the high rate of stroke patients who drop out of supervised therapy after being discharged from hospital.

Doctors at the National University of Singapore (NUS) Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health said those who do not continue with therapy greatly reduce their ability to perform daily activities.

Stroke is the fifth leading cause of death in Singapore, accounting for more than 1,400 deaths in 2010.

In Singapore, there are more than 10,000 new stroke patients every year. Of these, more than 60 per cent become moderately or severely disabled three months after a stroke attack.

But a study conducted from 2002 to 2005 on more than 200 patients from the Thye Hua Kwan Hospital and St Luke’s Hospital showed only a third continued with supervised therapy after they were discharged.

While this is comparable to that of the United States and above that of Australia, experts fear the number of immobile stroke patients will increase with time.

NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health Associate Professor Gerald Koh said researchers followed up with stroke patients after they left the inpatient rehabilitation setting and went back into the community where they were told to continue rehabilitation.

“We compared those who did more rehabilitation versus those who did less and we found those with more community rehabilitation not only had faster functional recovery at the end of one year, they also had greater functional recovery at the end of one year,” he added.

A key reason stroke patients do not continue with therapy even after discharge is the high financial burden.

On average, a day rehabilitation session costs about S$40. Experts normally recommend patients to go for it twice a week, so the cost comes up to about S$320 a month. Other reasons include the lack of caregivers who can accompany the patients.

With Singapore’s ageing population, doctors fear the number of stroke patients will rise. While they urged Singaporeans to do their part by staying healthy, doctors also urged the Government to look into ways to help these patients.

They said one way of incentivising patients to continue with therapy would be to provide subsidies for post-discharge therapy.

In the United Kingdom, for example, the government pays for post-discharge rehabilitation so it is no surprise that the adherence rates there are much higher, at about 90 per cent.

Funded by tax payers, the National Health Service of UK pays for ambulance service to ferry the stroke patients to rehabilitation centres and back.

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