Reviewer's report

Title: Stroke awareness in the general population: knowledge of stroke risk factors and warning signs in older adults

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Reviewer: Ruediger Rau

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BMC Geriatrics

Reviewers report

Manuscript by Anne Hickey et al.:

“Stroke awareness in the general population: …older adults”

The study addresses a very relevant Public Health issue, since Stroke is one of the leading causes of morbidity, mortality and, most importantly, long-term disability worldwide. Demographic trends will lead to a rise in both incidence and prevalence in Europe, confronting systems of health care, rehabilitation and prevention in all member states with serious challenges in the future.

Stroke has to be considered as an important cause of dementia, epilepsy and depression in the elderly.

ad1: Against this background it is very valuable to investigate community Stroke knowledge in older adults exclusively. The study question is well defined, corresponding to research need revealed by previous Public Health studies.

ad 2: Methods regarding the drawing of the study sample appear to be very good. As to the survey method it remains unclear, why open-ended questions were too “time-consuming”, whilst previous studies used open-ended questions in telephone surveys. It should be clarified, in how far two very different methods – open-ended questions and presenting a list with correct items – can be compared, i. e. evidence of the quality/objectiveness of these different approaches in investigating health-related knowledge?

Secondly, the authors introduce a new category with two correct answers as a dividing line. It is unclear, why this approach was chosen.

In summary, both factors affect comparability of the presented findings with reference studies, which are rightly cited in the study.

This limitation should be clarified an discussed in detail.
ad 3 and 4: Quality of data acquisition, reporting and deposition of data is sound.

ad 5: In the discussion the topical “Guidelines for Management of Ischaemic Stroke…2008” issued by the European Stroke Organisation (ESO) should be taken into consideration [Cerebrovasc Dis 2008;25:457-507]. In the chapter “Public Awareness and Education” all relevant findings are discussed and evaluated in the sense of evidence-based (social) medicine. The discussion about “evidence of the benefits of knowledge…” (page 18) for example should be enriched and up-dated in the presented paper.

In the discussion part the health care situation in the two study regions should be outlined. Especially, structure and process quality of patient referral and transfer (EMS), acute medical care (stroke unit?) and rehabilitation (which is crucial in improving outcomes in patients) should be describe briefly in this context. Improving community knowledge (and performance) is an important prerequisite in improving the chain of timely Stroke health care and rehabilitation [cf. ESO].

Acknowledgement of precursory work is acceptable; title and abstract as well as writing style are impeccable.

All in all, the present paper delivers a valuable contribution to both Public Health research and health care planning with respect to Stroke.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

'I declare that I have no competing interests'