Reviewer’s report

Title: Implementation and feasibility of the Stroke Nursing Guideline in the care of patients with stroke: a mixed methods study

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Reviewer: Ann Rowat

Reviewer's report:

This paper outlines the feasibility and implementation of stroke nurse rehabilitation guideline using a complex study design. This paper highlights important topic in relation to the nurses' role in rehabilitation, which remains difficult to define. There are some issues the authors may wish to consider in relation to the structure of the article in order to focus why a nurse-specific guideline will ultimately provide optimal care for stroke patients and there is scope to simplify the methods and results sections to make the article easier to follow:

Abstract: the aim of the study is clearly stipulated, however, the results focused mostly on the changes to documentation/reported improvements (need to include improvement compared to what i.e. control group), but the barriers and facilitators and nurses views were not included albeit stated as aims of study.

Background: this section could be restructured to highlight the importance of nursing specific rehabilitation in the context of their role as a key member of the MDT from the outset and the need for nurse rehab guidelines (this is not really addressed until page 6, line 139). There is also number of specific issues listed (page 5) - i.e. painful shoulder, depression, falls and education, but it is not clear why these areas are highlighted when the guideline includes 211 recommendations across a range of topics. Some of this could also be aligned to the previous publication by Hafsteindottir et al (2013) and should state clearly the importance on building on these findings to determine implementation i.e. the novel aspect of the current study.

Methods (page 8): The methods used mixed methods, which are appropriate for complex interventions. However, the section is very challenging to read and could be simplified and streamlined in terms of phases of study. The phases of the study were listed and some of the detail overlaps with how data was collected rather than stating the study design appropriate to address specific questions. The timeline was broadly discussed in terms of data collection, but dates between implementation and post test follow-up etc need to be clearly stated and included in the flow chart (fig 1) as this has implications for results. In the stroke guideline (page 9) section make it clear how nurses use it and what the nurses are expected to document (albeit training is provided as stated in page 13). This should made more clear so it aligns to data collection section i.e. that highlights the recommendations for each of the areas. The validity and reliability of QIT (a tool developed by authors) should also be stated.
Results (page 15) - throughout this section it is stated there are improvements in documenting but this needs to clearly stated in terms of the controls and pre-post test design/bias. The qualitative outcomes are included in terms of reporting in text/table did not seem to be fully reported as per what was expected in analysis.

Discussion: The findings were well discussed in this section. Need to highlight the difference between documenting/related improvements rather than the importance of a difference in patients outcomes before and after the intervention was implemented (i.e. future research that is warranted). There was scope to discuss the limitations of study design in more depth i.e. different patients pre and post test; the length of time between training and post test and the measures in terms of improvements in documentation rather than patient outcomes. Further research is warranted, but scope to state more specifically what next (i.e. see above). There is also scope to strengthen the conclusions in terms to what this study adds to stroke nursing care.

Tables/figures: there are too many and some i.e, table 1 could be included as supplementary data; table 5 the order of before and after should be other way round.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
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No

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