

Petitioner submission of 17 November 2023

PE2048/B: Review the FAST stroke awareness campaign

Dear Members of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee,

I write to you with a heavy heart, propelled by the urgency of a matter that has profoundly impacted my family and countless others across our nation. My purpose is to bring to your attention critical information that underscores the dire need for an immediate review and expansion of the current FAST stroke campaign.

Tragically, my family suffered the devastating loss of my 53-year-old father to a stroke that went undiagnosed until it was irreversibly late. His symptoms, regrettably, did not align with the parameters of the existing FAST campaign. A few weeks before his fatal stroke, he exhibited distressing signs—a loss of balance, persistent vomiting, and cold sweats—yet these fell beyond the scope of recognition under the current acronym.

During a visit to his GP, my father, concerned about a possible mini-stroke, sought guidance. However, the symptoms were dismissed as potential consequences of declining eyesight or excessive screen exposure. This dismissal, I am convinced, was due to the limitations imposed by the prevailing FAST campaign. Had there been an inclusive approach, such as a BE FAST (Balance, Eyes, Face, Arms, Speech, Throwing-up and Time) model, these symptoms might have triggered the necessary urgency for a comprehensive evaluation, potentially saving his life.

The alarming statistics, as outlined in the SPICe briefing, corroborate the inadequacy of the FAST test, particularly in detecting posterior strokes. Astonishingly, up to 40% of posterior circulation strokes are missed by the FAST test, encompassing 8-10% of all strokes. In a country where 11,257 strokes were reported in 2022, this translates to a staggering 900 to 1,125 strokes annually in Scotland alone that are overlooked due to the limitations of the current campaign.

This is an unacceptable reality in our modern society. The ramifications of this oversight extend far beyond statistics; they permeate the lives of families, leaving behind immeasurable grief and irreparable loss. Each

stroke missed is a life irrevocably altered or lost, and it is our collective responsibility to rectify this systemic flaw.

I implore the Committee to consider the gravity of these revelations and urge for an immediate and comprehensive review of the existing stroke awareness campaign.

Incorporating a more inclusive and encompassing acronym, such as BE FAST, can bridge the gap in identifying diverse stroke symptoms and ensure equitable access to life-saving interventions for all individuals.

We cannot allow a system that disproportionately favours the recognition of certain symptoms to persist. The time to act is now, to prevent further unnecessary loss and to ensure that every individual experiencing a stroke receives the timely care they deserve.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. I sincerely hope that my family's painful experience can serve as a catalyst for substantive change in our approach to stroke awareness and prevention.