

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE2048](#): 'Review the FAST stroke awareness campaign', lodged by James Anthony Bundy

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

[PE2048](#) calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to increase awareness of the symptoms of stroke by reviewing its promotion of the FAST stroke campaign and ensuring that awareness campaigns include all the symptoms of a potential stroke.

The petition was lodged in response to Anthony (Tony) Bundy's death in June 2023 after suffering a basilar artery ischaemic stroke. The petitioner stated that when his father, Tony, experienced a stroke, his face and arms were unaffected, and his speech was not slurred. This meant that Tony passed the FAST stroke test and did not receive emergency treatment in time to save his life.

Prevalence of strokes in Scotland

There were 11,257 [reported strokes in Scotland](#) in 2022, an increase from 11,055 in 2021. Public Health Scotland's latest data showed that in the year ending 31 March 2022, [3,836 deaths were reported](#) in which cerebrovascular disease, including stroke, was the underlying cause. The statistics published on deaths due to stroke in Scotland do not currently include details of the type of stroke experienced.

Stroke symptoms and the FAST test

A stroke is a [life-threatening medical emergency](#), which occurs when the blood supply to part of the brain is cut off. Urgent treatment is essential to minimise damage to the brain and potentially save the individual's life.

The [FAST test](#) is used to assess a patient for the most common symptoms of a stroke:

- **Facial weakness:** Can the person smile? Has their mouth or eye drooped?
- **Arm weakness:** Can the person raise both arms?

- **Speech problems:** Can the person speak clearly and understand what you say?
- **Time to call 999:** if you see any of these signs.

Although the FAST test can identify most strokes, patients can also present with [other less common symptoms](#), as the petitioner notes. These symptoms include:

- nausea and vomiting
- complete paralysis of one side of the body
- sudden loss or blurring of vision
- dizziness
- confusion
- difficulty understanding what others are saying
- difficulty swallowing
- problems with balance and co-ordination
- a sudden, very severe headache causing a blinding pain unlike anything experienced before
- loss of consciousness.

A [2021 systematic review of evidence](#) found that the FAST test accurately detected 69-90% of strokes. However, the review noted that the FAST test missed up to 40% of [posterior circulation strokes](#), such as the [basilar artery ischaemic stroke](#) experienced by Tony Bundy. Posterior strokes affect the blood flow at the back of the brain, and [account for 20-25%](#) of all acute strokes. They can [cause different symptoms](#) than those assessed by the FAST test, including vertigo, vision problems, and nausea and vomiting. The [systematic review](#) noted that the less commonly used BE-FAST (Balance, Eyes, Face, Arms, Speech, Time) test identified more ischaemic strokes than the FAST test, and stated that it may play an important role in the diagnosis of strokes.

The National Advisory Committee for Stroke (NACS) 2022 report, "[A Progressive Stroke Pathway](#)", emphasised the importance of targeted education for health professionals to recognise the signs and symptoms of stroke, including in certain circumstances where presentation may be atypical, such as a negative FAST test.

[FAST campaigns](#) aim to raise public awareness of the main symptoms of a stroke and emphasise the need for urgent medical treatment. Stroke awareness campaigns commonly focus on the FAST acronym; however, [NHS England's 2023 stroke awareness campaign advice](#) also made reference to less common symptoms of a stroke. [NHS Inform's webpage about strokes](#) also includes details of less common symptoms.

Scottish Government actions

The [Scottish Government's Stroke Improvement Plan 2023](#) listed awareness raising among its key priorities in the delivery of stroke care. The Plan committed to working to understand public awareness of stroke symptoms and supporting the delivery of FAST awareness campaigns.

In response to written question [S6W-20425](#) on 29 August 2023, the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health, Jenni Minto MSP, stated that the Scottish Government will "work with third sector organisations and health marketing colleagues to consider the most effective way of raising public awareness, including the less common symptoms of stroke."

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12 October 2023

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

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