

PE2048/V: Review the FAST stroke awareness campaign

NHS Ayrshire and Arran written submission, 31 March 2025

Within NHS Ayrshire and Arran (NHSAA) we have promoted stroke awareness via the FAST campaign for a number of years. Early recognition of stroke / TIA is essential in reducing mortality / morbidity and long-term outcomes. Being able to recognise the symptoms of stroke is key in getting urgent help by calling 999 and improving the chance of better outcome.

Raising public awareness is key and the FAST campaign enhances this by recognising the signs below:

F - Face: Look for an uneven smile

A - Arm: Check if one arm is weak

S - Speech: Listen for slurred speech

T - Time: Call 999 right away

However approximately 40% of posterior circulation strokes are missed using FAST screening due to a lack of public awareness in relation to balance and vision issues being recognised as signs of stroke.

As such we very much within NHSAA, with the support of Dr Whitehead Stroke Consultant, were keen to raise awareness of the other symptoms of stroke. The current evidence is clear that BEFAST is helpful at identifying posterior stroke events that are missed by FAST and leads to greater treatment rates. However current evidence has demonstrated this can lead to a significant rise in false negative diagnoses. This has knock-on negative effects throughout the system.

Until there is further research to support BEFAST, within NHSAA, we are continuing with the FAST campaign with a reminder that stroke may present with other symptoms such as balance or visual issues. TIME is BRAIN and it is essential all symptoms are recognised by the public to promote early recognition of stroke and rapid access to treatments such as thrombolysis and thrombectomy.

F - Face: Look for an uneven smile

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Other symptoms of stroke include balance and visual issues.

A quality improvement questionnaire has been undertaken within NHSAA with patients to identify where patients receive information on stroke symptoms. The results were wide ranging including social media, GP surgery, TV, radio etc. Younger patients were more likely to access information via social media.

We hope to gain support to be able to use real patient stories with the support of the patient experience team and use these to enhance public awareness of stroke. We would like to use stories from patients who have had FAST symptoms as well as

visual and balance issues and include patients from each decade to demonstrate stroke can also happen at any age. We want to be able to promote public awareness across NHSAA. Within the stroke unit we have FAST as well as the other symptoms of Balance and Eyes on our whiteboard for patients and families to recognise the wide range of symptoms.