

Handout 6

Stroke related glossary of terms

Agnosia

Inability to recognise an object or person, although visual mechanisms remain intact.

Agraphia

Inability to express thoughts in writing or by drawing.

Alexia

Inability to read.

Aneurysm

A balloon-like bulge in the wall of an artery which may burst and cause a haemorrhage (bleeding). Sometimes called “berry aneurysm” because of its resemblance to a berry.

(Aneurysm) clipping

Surgical procedure involving clamping an aneurysm, surgically removing the ballooned part of the blood vessel, and closing the opening in the artery wall.

Angioma

An abnormal collection of blood vessels that can be a cause of a haemorrhage in the brain.

Angioplasty

A technique whereby a doctor inserts a catheter into the narrowed portion of the artery and stretches the artery by inflating a little balloon on the end of the catheter.

Aphasia

Inability to use language. It can either be a problem understanding language (receptive) or speaking it (expressive). People are often affected by both sorts. See: **Dysphasia**.

Apraxia

The inability to control and co-ordinate movements or carry out complex tasks when requested, caused by damage to the part of the brain responsible for voluntary movement and not by paralysis of the muscles or lack of comprehension. Can affect sequencing (ability to do things in logical order, to achieve a goal) and even speech.

Ataxia

Loss of control of the muscle function, leading to unsteadiness, a staggering walk and difficulty performing delicate tasks with the hands.

Auditory agnosia

Failure to recognise specific sounds, which may be background noise, words, or even music.

Carotid arteries

There are two carotid arteries on each side of the neck which carry blood from the heart to the head, notably the face and front of the brain. Disease or blockage of a carotid artery (carotid stenosis) is a common cause of stroke.

Carotid endarterectomy

The operation that is performed to clear the inside of the carotid artery of atheroma.

Cognition

The function of processing information and applying knowledge.

Cognitive function

Processes requiring thought and intelligence, such as attention, perception, learning, memory, comprehension, judgment and decision making.

Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)

A harmful clot of blood in a deep vein within the leg, for which there are many risk factors, including cancer, pregnancy, major operations, severe infection, inactivity and stroke. Anticoagulant injections and ongoing treatment may be prescribed, as well as wearing support stockings.

Dysarthria

Slurred speech arising from muscle weakness, in which the pronunciation is unclear although the meaning of what is said is properly expressed.

Dysgraphia

Difficulty in writing.

Dyslexia

Difficulty in reading.

Dysphagia

Difficulty in swallowing.

Dysphasia

Difficulty in using language. It can either be a problem understanding language (receptive) or speaking it (expressive). People are often affected by both sorts.

Dysphonia

Difficulty in voice production, either speaking loud (or soft) enough, due to a disorder with the muscles in the throat, mouth or tongue.

Dyspraxia

Difficulty in controlling and co-ordinating movements or carrying out complex tasks when requested, caused by damage to the part of the brain responsible for voluntary movement and not by paralysis of the muscles or lack of comprehension. Can affect sequencing (ability to do things in logical order, to achieve a goal) and even speech.

Embolism

The blockage of a blood vessel by an embolus — something previously circulating in the blood (such as a blood clot, air bubble, cholesterol, etc.).

Endarterectomy

Surgical operation to remove obstructions (usually fatty tissue or blood clot) from inside an artery.

Extracranial-intracranial bypass

Surgery to restore blood flow to an area of brain tissue by re-routing a healthy artery in the scalp to the area of brain tissue affected by a blocked or narrowed artery.

FAST test

“Face, Arm, Speech, Time” – Simple reminder of the symptoms of stroke, to help the public and paramedics to recognise likely cases of stroke.

Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI)

An advanced magnetic scanning technique used to generate images of changing blood flow in the brain associated with neural activity. Increasingly used in early diagnosis, as it is very sensitive to early changes in the brain which follow stroke.

Haematoma

A blood clot that has formed outside a blood vessel (artery or vein).

Haemorrhage

The escape of blood from a ruptured blood vessel, externally or internally.

Haemorrhagic infarct

An area of dead brain that has had bleeding in it.

Haemorrhagic stroke

A stroke caused by a burst blood vessel bleeding into the brain (intracerebral haemorrhage) or into the surrounding areas (subarachnoid haemorrhage).

Hemianopia

Loss of one-half of the normal field of vision. Homonymous hemianopia is the loss of the same half (either left or right) of the visual field in both eyes.

Hemiparesis

Weakness of one-half of the body.

Hemiplegia

Complete paralysis of half of the body.

Heparin

An anticoagulant drug given to prevent blood clots forming.

Homocysteine

An amino acid, which is an intermediate product in the biosynthesis of protein.

Hughes Syndrome

(also known as Primary Antiphospholipid Syndrome). Sometimes called 'sticky blood syndrome' because people with it have an increased tendency to form clots in blood vessels. Other symptoms include migraine, DVT, recurrent miscarriages, movement disorder, spinal cord lesions, organ thrombosis including heart, brain, kidney, liver and lung. One in five cases of stroke in people under 45 is associated with this condition which can usually be treated once diagnosed.

Hydrocephalus

Raised pressure within the skull due to an abnormal build-up of the fluid that surrounds the brain. It can occur after a brain haemorrhage. May be treated by the surgical placement of a shunt system.

Infarct/infarction

An area of the brain tissue that has died as a result of being deprived of its blood supply.

Intracerebral haemorrhage

A haemorrhage inside the brain.

Ischaemia

Damage to the brain where brain cells have had an inadequate blood supply (see also transient ischaemic attack).

Ischaemic stroke

This type of stroke happens when a clot blocks an artery carrying blood to the brain.

Lability

Emotional lability (uncontrolled crying, laughing and swearing).

Magnetic Resonance Angiography (MRA)

Process that involves injection of contrast material into a blood vessel and uses a large, powerful magnet, rather than X-rays, to create pictures of the blood vessels.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)

A type of scan that, instead of X-rays, uses a large, powerful magnet to create an image (picture) of part of the body. Provides detailed structural information on the brain, showing inflammation and bleeding, and changes over time. A further development called functional magnetic resonance imaging can also provide information on metabolism, showing how well the brain is functioning.

MID (Multi-Infarct Dementia)

Multi-infarct dementia is a form of dementia caused by a number of small blood clots (emboli) in the brain that starve the brain cells of oxygen. Also known as Vascular Dementia.

Myocardial infarction

The medical term for a heart attack.

Neglect (left or right-sided neglect)

Ignoring or not being aware of being touched on one side, or not seeing things to one side. In extreme cases, an individual may not be aware that their arm or leg belongs to them.

Neuroplasticity

The brain's ability to reorganise itself, by forming new neural connections throughout life. After stroke or other damage, this involves nerve cells taking over the function of other nerve cells that are no longer functioning.

Pulmonary embolism

A blood clot in the lungs, which can very rapidly lead to sudden death.

Subarachnoid haemorrhage

Bleeding between the brain and one of the covering membranes, often due to a leaking aneurysm.

Thrombolysis

The use of drugs to break up a blood clot, a treatment which can be given to a minority of patients in the acute stage of ischaemic stroke.

Thrombosis

The formation of a blood clot (plural: thromboses).

Tissue Plasminogen Activator (t-PA) or Recombinant Tissue Plasminogen Activator (rt-PA)

The drug most commonly used for thrombolysis. Safe use depends upon the findings of a diagnostic brain scan, and it must be given within 3 hours of the onset of symptoms.

Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS)

Magnetic current applied to an area of the brain to promote plasticity and healing.

Transient Ischaemic Attack (TIA)

A stroke-like event that fully recovers within 24 hours of the start of symptoms.

Vertebral arteries

The two arteries that travel up the back of the neck to the brain which, along with the two carotid arteries, supply all the blood to the brain.

Video fluoroscopy

A non-invasive radiological technique used in assessing swallowing ability. Useful in determining when to resume eating, the easiest and safest foods to eat, and identifying treatment techniques that will improve safety during eating.

Visual agnosia

A visual recognition disorder, characterised by the inability to make sense of visual stimuli, as when familiar objects/people can not be recognised. This is often due to damage, in posterior occipital and/or temporal lobe(s) of the brain.

Visual field-cut/field impairment

Loss of sight in a particular area of the visual field, of which the person may be unaware. With a field impairment to one side a person is likely to walk into doorposts or ignore friends on that side of the room. A lower visual field impairment may cause difficulty in walking without tripping over things on the ground, reading from the lower part of pages, or seeing food on the edge of the plate. Lenses that incorporate a prism may be beneficial.

Visual memory

The capacity of the brain to retain visual imagery. Usually the brain records information and data better when it is perceived visually.

Visual neglect

Where a person fails to pay attention to their body or environment on the affected side. This more frequently affects attention to the left side. A person with neglect may no longer wash that side of their face and may experience difficulty navigating even in familiar places. Also known as hemispatial agnosia or hemispatial neglect.

Visual perception

The ability to interpret visible information reaching the eyes, which is then made available for planning and action. The resulting perception is also known as eyesight, sight or vision.

A fuller glossary of terms can be found at www.stroke.org.uk/information/glossary/a.html.