

## ORIGINAL PAPER

## Exploratory Study of Patients' Life Situation after a Stroke

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### Abstract

**Background.** Brain diseases are a major health issue in modern societies, leading to multiple losses and disruptions.

**Objective.** Based on the question “*Are stroke patients' quality of life and well-being also influenced by hospitalization and its duration and nature?*”, this study aimed to characterize the patients' life situation upon returning home, assess the illness and recovery process, and understand how stroke patients experience hospital stay and discharge.

**Methodology.** Qualitative, descriptive, exploratory study, using semi-structured interviews with a nonprobability sample of recent stroke patients.

**Results.** Data were presented using three different approaches: a brief socio-demographic characterization; a description of the general meaning captured; and a detailed assessment of the themes identified. Mean age of 71 years ( $71.3 \pm 10.4$ ); an average of 690 days since the ischemic episode; length of hospital stay between 9 and 61 days ( $\bar{x}=21$  days). Interviews were conducted in distinct contexts. The mRS and BI scores revealed significant functional preservation. Different experiences were found regarding the “length of hospital stay”, availability, attitude towards disease, recovery and after-effects, lifestyles, regaining control, and family involvement. The importance given to body functioning, organic dimension, and presence of pain are underlined. As aspects of quality of life, participants underlined the family unit, discrimination and “weight of the gaze”, and support network and its importance. Positive judgments were made and critical aspects were identified, such as fear and anxiety about the future. Hospitalization was perceived as necessary, while discharge triggered positive emotions and relief, despite being a source of concern and fear.

**Conclusions.** In this study, patients expressed pain, discomfort and depressive mood (despite their good functional recovery). Small changes in their personal, family and social routines were significantly valued. Despite criticisms, patients assessed the care process as positive. Hospitalization was understood as virtuous, and discharge, though desired, was anticipated with concern and fear.

**Keywords.** Stroke; ischemic stroke; hospitalization process; discharge, stroke survivor's experience; length of stay.