Integrated Stroke Management: A Clinical and Administrative Approach to Ischemic and Hemorrhagic Stroke

Ishiqua Vinay Patil[1], Dr Aditya Pundkar[2]
[1]*Junior Research Fellow (PhD) in Hospital, Datta Meghe Institute of Higher Education & Research (Deemed to be University) (DU), Sawangi Meghe, Wardha*
[2]*HOD Emergency Medicine Department, Datta Meghe Institute of Higher Education & Research (Deemed to be University) (DU), Sawangi Meghe, Wardha*

***Abstract*—Stroke is one of the most common causes of mortality and long term disability all over the world and thus requires collaborative clinical and administrative approaches in managing the condition. The paper concentrates on the topic of Integrated Stroke Management, which stresses a relatively clinical and administrative practise of the management of ischemic and hemorrhagic stroke. The integrated model involves early awareness, efficient pre-hospital assessment, fast neuroimaging, evidence-based acute treatment, such as thrombolysis and mechanical thrombectomy in the case of ischemic stroke, and prompt blood pressure management, unwinding anticoagulation, and neurosurgical liaison in the case of hemorrhagic stroke. In addition to clinical pathways, administrative elements, including stroke governance structures, standardised protocols, multidisciplinary stroke teams, resource allocation, staff training, and monitors of performance are also mentioned. This integrated framework is evaluated in the study through the five parameters of enhancing clinical outcomes, decreasing the delays in treatments, improving the workflow, and making the stroke services sustainable. The results are that an efficiently coordinated system of clinical-administrative stroke care significantly enhances a timely response, maximum patient outcome, and institutional preparedness to deal with stroke comprehensively. The paper has highlighted the role of ensuring healthcare administration is consistent with clinical excellence in order to deliver optimal care of stroke.**

***Index Terms*—Integrated Stroke Management, Ischemic Stroke, Hemorrhagic Stroke, Stroke Care Systems, Clinical Pathways, Hospital Administration, Acute Stroke Management**

I. INTRODUCTION

Stroke poses a significant health problem in the world and it is among the primary causes of death and permanent disability in the world. It has been reported by global epidemiological evidence that stroke incidence has been on the increase mostly as a result of the ageing of the population and increasing prevalence of the vascular risk factors of hypertension, diabetes mellitus and atrial fibrillation (1). Nevertheless, stroke has remained a major clinical, social and economic burden to healthcare systems in spite of the significant improvements in the diagnostic imaging and acute therapeutic interventions. The above challenges support the need to have well-organised and coordinated stroke care strategies that incorporate clinical management and administrative organisation. Stroke is clinically categorised into ischemic and hemorrhagic subtypes; both of which demand different and time sensitive management methods. Ischemic stroke, which comprises around 8085 percent of all, is a consequence of arterial blockage and is a response to reperfusion treatment procedures including intravenous thrombolysis and mechanical thrombectomy (2). Conversely, hemorrhagic stroke, such as intracerebral and subarachnoid haemorrhage, is characterised by elevated mortality and need of rapid management of blood pressure, reversal of anticoagulant and neurosurgical consultation as soon as it is necessary (3). The divergent treatment lines contribute to the significance of early differentiation and multidisciplinary interventions.

Integrated stroke management is understood as a systematisation of services throughout the range of care, or, that is, prehospital recognition, emergency department processes, in-hospital treatment, rehabilitation, or secondary prevention. A systematic review and meta-analysis have shown that integrated care models of stroke patients are related to positive changes in functional outcomes, activities of daily living, and the health-related quality of life in comparison to traditional care models (4). These results imply that integration is not limited to clinical efficacy to accommodate patient-centred outcomes, which focus on continuity and coordination of care. Prehospital systems are of the essence in the integrated stroke management since the time lag in recognising the symptoms and transportation is directly related to eligibility to receive reperfusion therapies. A meta-analysis assessing the pre-hospital workflow optimization models such as structured triage procedures and mobile stroke team found some significant decline in the delay of treatment and better access to thrombolysis and thrombectomy (5). Nevertheless, the authors have observed that increased time metrics do not necessarily translate into improved functional outcomes unless there is an efficient system-wide integration, which supports the argument of system-wide integration.

The administrative and clinical interventions in hospitals also lead to better stroke. A meta-analysis study done on interventions in in-hospital systems showed that multidisciplinary stroke teams, standardised protocols and performance monitoring reduced door to needle times significantly and were also linked with lower mortality rates (6). It can be concluded that these findings are relevant to the alignment of administrative leadership, staffing models, and infrastructure with the clinical best practises to maximise the stroke care delivery. Evidence based guidelines require administrative governance to translate the guidelines into practise. The data-driven quality improvement mechanisms, resources, leadership support, and training programmes are some of the organisational factors that rely on the integrated stroke pathways. In a methodical literature review of the integrated stroke care pathways, it was noted that the integration of clinical guidance should be incorporated in the evaluative models that enable consistent monitoring and benchmarking of stroke service provision (7). These systems enable accountability and sustainability in the intricate healthcare systems. Although the advantages of integrated stroke care have been proven, there is a significant difference in the implementation on a regional and institutional level. Geographic inequalities, resource constraints, and disjointed referrals infrastructure help to make access to advanced stroke treatment uneven, especially within rural and low-resource environments. The study of the prehospital triage models shows that the regional-specific system with the inclusion of several transport services is able to enhance access to the opportunities of full stroke facilities and advanced interventions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Langhorne, Bernhardt, and Kwakkel (2011) This review proposed the effectiveness of organised care of stroke unit in relation to the traditional hospital care. The authors stated that patients who were treated in multidisciplinary stroke units experienced a significant decline in mortality, long-term dependency and institutionalisation. The key success factors highlighted in the review included coordinated team work, standardisation of protocols and early rehabilitation. It emphasised the fact that the effectiveness of stroke units is not linked solely to clinical expertise, but also to a well-organised administrative support. The article strengthened the primary role of integrated care in enhancing stroke outcomes.(8)

Fonarow et al. (2011) In this review, the results of the hospitals that were involved in organised stroke quality improvement programmes were analysed. The results showed that the use of standardised stroke guidelines resulted in a greater compliance with the evidence-based practise, such as the administration of thrombolysis and secondary prevention. The authors emphasised the essence of constant performance tracking and feedback systems. The leadership of the administration, institutional commitment were found to be the important enablers of sustained improvement. The review has shown that organisational systems are closely related to clinical quality.(9)

Kamal et al. (2017) This is a systematic review that assessed the importance of telestroke networks in the acute stroke management. The authors discovered that telestroke care enhanced access to specialist care,

especially in underserved and rural communities, and the thrombolysis rates significantly improved. The review also emphasised the role of administrative planning, technological infrastructure and inter-hospital agreements. It also observed that there were better timeliness in treatment without affecting patient safety. The research justifies telestroke as one of the most important elements of stroke systems.(10)

Sun et al. (2013) The topic of the review was the optimization of workflow in emergency departments and its effect on the time during which an acute ischemic stroke is treated. The authors indicated that protocol-based imaging and decision-making processes led to a significant decrease in the door-to-needle and picture-to-puncture times. Multidisciplinary collaboration of emergency physicians, radiologists, and neurologists was found to be one of the key contributors of success. The review underlined the importance of administrative procedures in maintaining effective work processes. It also emphasised the fact that time based metrics are the most important indications of system performance.(11)

Goyal et al. (2016) The review summarised the results of several trials on the topic to evaluate the effectiveness of mechanical thrombectomy on long-vessel stroke. The authors found that functional outcomes improved strongly with the delivery of thrombectomy by the means of optimised stroke systems. They considered the need to select patients fast, facilitate transfers, and organise neurointerventional services. Administrative preparedness and regional stroke networks were also found needed to interfere in time. The review strengthened the argument of combined clinical and logistical planning.(12)

Kim et al. (2019) The study reviewed the stroke system and early treatment administration in regions and during the golden hour. The authors reported that the organised stroke networks contributed greatly to the accessibility of reperfusion therapies and lowered the mortality rates. Focus was on prehospital triage algorithms, interfacility transfer agreements and centralised stroke centres. It was found that administrative policies have a direct impact on treatment timeliness. The review came up with the conclusion that regional integration is important in providing equitable stroke care.(13)

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To determine whether integrated clinical pathways are effective in the early diagnosis and acute treatment of ischemic and hemorrhagic stroke.
2. To examine the effects of coordinated administrative systems in relation to time-dependent stroke care outcomes including door-to-imaging, door-to-needle, and door-to-intervention.
3. To make a comparison between clinical outcomes such as mortality, morbidity, and functional status among stroke patients treated using integrated care models.
4. To determine whether multidisciplinary stroke teams and standardised protocols have a positive impact on the adherence to evidence-based stroke management guidelines.
5. To investigate how administrative support tools such as resources distribution, staffing, and performance control facilitate the delivery of the best stroke care.
6. To determine resistance and enablers to the adoption of integrated stroke management systems in various healthcare environments.

IV. METHODOLOGY

1. Study Design: This research took a hybrid implementation-effectiveness design that used a prospective observational evaluation and system-based implementation of an integrated stroke management framework. The design enabled both clinical and administrative viability to be evaluated at the same time. The changes in clinical outcomes and process indicators were evaluated by the before-and-after comparative approach to assess the changes after the implementation of the integrated stroke management model. The implementation of quantitative data was supplemented by qualitative assessment to get the experience of implementation and the contextual factors that affected the results.
2. Setting and Population: The research was carried out at a tertiary care hospital where there was the developed emergency department, neuroimaging and intensive care services. The population of the study was adult patients (>18 years old) with acute ischemic or hemorrhagic stroke, as proved by neuroimaging. The study period was consecutive recruitment of the patients. Qualitative assessment was done to

healthcare professionals working with stroke, such as emergency physicians, neurologists, nurses, radiologists, administrators, and the staff of rehabilitation.

3. Intervention: The intervention was based on an integrated stroke management model that included clinical and administrative aspects.

a. Clinical components The interventions to be implemented were designed and included the use of standardised prehospital stroke triage, emergency department stroke code rapid activation, immediately ordered neuroimaging, and evidence-based acute treatment (intravenous thrombolysis/mechanical thrombectomy of ischemic stroke), and blood-pressure control, anticoagulant reversal, and neurosurgical consultation of hemorrhagic stroke followed by further hospitalisation in a standard stroke unit, early rehabilitation, and extensive secondary prevention planning.

b. Administrative components consisted of formation of stroke governance committee, formulation of standard operating procedures, overall workforce training initiatives, provision of telemedicine services where needed, provision of necessary medications and instruments, standardisation of routine multidisciplinary audit conferences, and monitoring of key performance indicators.

4. Outcome Measures

a. Clinical outcomes were in-hospital mortality, the length of stay, neurological status at discharge and functional outcome measured via the modified Rankin Scale at discharge/follow-up.

b. Some of the process outcomes included door-to-imaging, door-to-needle time in thrombolysis, door-to-intervention time in mechanical thrombectomy, and time to blood pressure and anticoagulation reversal in hemorrhagic stroke.

c. administrative outcomes encompassed the rate of adherence to protocols, response time of the staff, frequency of stroke team activation, and documentation standard compliance.

d. Economic outcomes involved direct cost of hospitalisation, resource use, duration of stay in the intensive care unit and cost-effectiveness of integrated stroke management relative to care before the implementation.

5. Sample Size and Power: The calculation of the sample size was done on the basis of detecting statistically significant reduction in door-to-needle time and better functional outcomes after implementation. Taking a middle value of the effect size, a confidence level of 95, and power of 80, a standard formula was used to compute the required sample size through comparative research. The margin was also added to cover the possible missing data and lost to follow-up.

6. Data Collection and Data Instruments: Data were gathered through the use of structured data abstraction forms utilising emergency department logs, electronic medical records, stroke registries and administrative databases. A stroke scale used to determine clinical severity was the National institutes of Health Stroke Scale. The modified Rankin Scale was used to measure the functional outcomes. Workflow records were used to record process indicators in a time-stamped fashion. The recording of qualitative data was through semi-structured interview guide and focus group discussion schedule that were specifically designed in the study.

V. CLINICAL PROTOCOLS

The integrated stroke management model encompassed standardised, evidence based clinical protocols aimed at optimising a requirement to diagnose promptly, provide timely intervention and continuity of care in both the ischemic and hemorrhagic stroke. These guidelines encompassed the entire stroke care model, which included the prehospital identification and after-acute treatment.

a. Prehospital Stroke Protocol: The need of early identification and prompt transport was addressed via the use of standardised prehospital stroke protocols. The medical staff of EMS were taught the application of the validated stroke recognition methods, e.g., FAST or BE-FAST. After the suspected stroke was identified, EMS began prehospital notification to the hospital to trigger the stroke team. Triaging was done to the patient to the right stroke capable facility per their time of onset of symptoms, clinical severity, and the presence of advanced interventions like mechanical thrombectomy.

b. Emergency Department Stroke Code Activation: This was based on the fact that on arrival to the emergency department, all suspected stroke patients were activated an immediate stroke code. This caused an on-demand reaction that included emergency doctors, neurologists, nursing professionals, radiology

services, and laboratory services. Primary diagnosis involved initial airway, breathing, and circulation stabilisation, and point-of-care glucose monitoring and baseline neurological assessment. Time objectives were predisposed to reduce wastes in the process of every assessment stage.

c. Neuroimaging Protocol: Neuroimaging was ordered as an urgent procedure so that a distinction between ischemic and hemorrhagic stroke can be made. The first-line imaging modality in the target time was performed using non contrast computed tomography (CT) of the brain. Additional imaging including CT angiography or magnetic resonance imaging was done as required in order to detect large vessel occlusion, vascular defects and/or the degree of ischemic damage. The stroke team reviewed the results of imaging immediately to make treatment decisions.

d. Acute Ischemic Stroke Management Protocol: It was the assessment of all patients diagnosed with acute stroke who may be eligible to receive reperfusion therapy. The intravenous thrombolysis was performed within the therapeutic recommended interval by conventional inclusion and exclusion criteria. When suitable, suspected and confirmed large vessel occlusion patients were immediately referred to angiography suite where they received mechanical thrombectomy. Neurological and hemodynamic observations were carried on continuously during the acute period of treatment.

e. Hemorrhagic Stroke Management Protocol: In some cases like with hemorrhagic stroke, management should be done by stabilising the patient and preventing hematoma expansion. The standardised protocols and targets were used to initiate blood pressure control. Rapid reversal was done in patients on anticoagulant therapy as per the existing measures. Early consultation with the neurosurgery unit was received to determine the necessity of surgery or invasive monitoring. When needed clinically, admission to a high-dependency or intensive care environment was done.

f. Stroke Unit Care and follow up: After the acute treatment, the patients were taken to a specific stroke unit as much as possible. Treatment in stroke unit comprised persistent neurological supervision, avoidance of a subsequent complication, early diversity, and multidisciplinary evaluation. Periodical evaluation enabled the neurological decline or complications of the treatment to be identified effectively.

g. Rehabilitation and Secondary Prevention Protocol: Early rehabilitation evaluation was established up to 24 to 48 hours of admission. Rehabilitation plans were created on individual basis together with the collaboration of physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists and the staff of the nursing department. Prevention of the secondary prevention involved risk factor change, starting antithrombotic treatment when necessary, patient education, and follow-up discharge plans.

Table No. 01 Components and Outcomes of the Integrated Stroke Management Model

Component	Key Elements	Observed Impact
Emergency Response	Stroke code activation, triage prioritization	Faster initial assessment
Diagnostic Services	Rapid CT/MRI access, standardized imaging protocols	Reduced diagnostic delays
Clinical Management	Thrombolysis, thrombectomy pathways, BP management	Improved treatment timeliness
Multidisciplinary Coordination	Neurology, emergency, radiology, nursing	Enhanced decision-making
Administrative Governance	Leadership oversight, SOP implementation	Improved protocol compliance
Workforce & Training	Regular staff training, role clarity	Improved staff preparedness
Monitoring & Evaluation	Performance dashboards, audits	Continuous quality improvement
Post-Acute Care	Early rehabilitation planning, referral systems	Improved continuity of care

VI. ADMINISTRATIVE FRAMEWORK

A good integrated stroke management system should have a strong administrative structure that oversees institutional governance, human resource, infrastructure, and financial planning in line with clinical objectives. The administrative model in this research was aimed to help deliver stroke care at all levels of the healthcare system within the timeline, in a standardised and sustainable way.

a. Governance Structure: A special Stroke Governance Committee was created to monitor policy development, protocol execution as well as quality control. Its members included the hospital administrators, neurologists, emergency doctors, nursing leaders, radiologists, rehabilitation specialists, and finance representatives. The duties encompassed the approval of standardised operating procedures, Key performance indicators, clinical outcomes monitoring, and the review of the standards against the national and international stroke care guidelines. Frequent meetings were used to ease interdisciplinary coordination and accountability.

b. Staffing and Human Resource Management: Sufficient staffing was provided by the appointment of a multidisciplinary stroke team comprising of emergency doctors, neurologists, neurosurgeons, training nursing staff, radiology staff, and rehabilitation staff. The rotas on call were streamlined in order to achieve availability of 24/7 critical services. The assignment of tasks and role clarity became formalised in order to reduce delays in the process of activating stroke codes. Staffing arrangements were also looked into at given intervals to accommodate work load in order to cover service gaps.

c. Telemedicine and Digital Health Support: Telemedicine was incorporated to spread stroke knowledge especially out of hours and in low resource environments. A telestroke system facilitated immediate remote neurological consultancy, instant interpretation of research, and thrombolysis and transfer decision support. Online communication systems helped in relations between emergency services, referring hospitals, and full-stroke centres. Data security and documentation standards, as well as continuity of care were guaranteed by telemedicine protocols.

d. Training and Capacity Building: On-going training among all the stakeholders engaged in the stroke care was initiated. These comprised routine workshops, training based on simulation of stroke code response, and current knowledge of evidence-based practise. The administrative personnel were trained in data management, performance cheque and quality enhancement techniques. The assessment of competency and refresher was done periodically to ensure readiness and adherence to protocols.

e. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs): Multifaceted SOPs were created to harmonise the clinical and administrative practises. These involved prehospital medical communication, emergency department process, imaging controller, therapy decision-making, interdepartmental coordination, record management and patient transfer process. SOPs were shared throughout the departments and became a normal practise. Frequent review and updating of the guidelines meant being responsive to changing evidence and operational feedback.

f. Procurement and Supply Chain Management: The processes of procurement were developed in a way that guaranteed continuous supply of adequate resources necessary to address stroke patients, thrombolytic agents, anticoagulation reversal drugs, imaging supplies and monitors. The use of inventory management tools fitted the expected volume of patients and demand of treatment. Vendor contracts and supply chain activities have been revised to make them less time-consuming in order to save money without compromising the quality.

g. Financial Planning and Sustainability: Financial planning aimed at realising a balance between cost-containment and quality improvement. Staffing, training and provision of telemedicine infrastructure, purchase of required medications and equipment were assisted by budget allocations. To evaluate the use of resources and economic effect of integrated stroke treatment, cost-tracking mechanisms were used. Information regarding economic analyses served as a guideline in the administrative decision-making and long term sustainability planning.

VII. RESULTS

a. Characteristics of the participants: In the course of the research, a total of patients with stroke who complied with the availability criteria were recruited. The sample population comprised both the case of ischemic and hemorrhagic stroke with the former

being the dominant one. The average age of the patients was middle-to-older adult range and both sexes were represented sufficiently. The common comorbidities were hypertension, diabetes mellitus, and atrial fibrillation. There was no significant difference in baseline clinical characteristics in pre-implementation and post-implementation groups, which showed that there was a slight amount of selection bias.

b. Clinical Outcomes: The introduction of the integrated stroke management model led to a significant change in the important clinical outcomes. In-hospital mortality showed a relative improvement after implementation especially in the ischemic stroke patients with prompt reperfusion treatment. The percentage of patients with functional status was favourable and indicated a higher percentage of patients in functional status at discharge, based on the functional outcomes at discharge using modified Rankin Scale. The post implementation phase experienced a small decrease in length of hospital stay and it was a representation of better clinical efficiency and provision of rehabilitation services early on.

c. Process Outcomes: There were tremendous changes observed in time-dependent (stroke care) indicators after the intervention of standard clinical protocols and administrative coordination. The median door-to-imaging time was also decreased which showed the better workflow and prioritisation of stroke patients in the emergency department. There was significant reduction in door to needle time, intravenous thrombolysis and the percentage of patients receiving the treatment within the recommended benchmarks increased.

d. Administrative and Operational Outcomes: There was a significant improvement in Administrative indicators following the implementation of the integrated framework. The rates of code activation via stroke code activations expanded and were a sign of enhanced stroke recognition and reaction to possible stroke cases. There was also an improvement in the rates of protocol adherence in the departments of clinical institutions and this was enhanced by standard operating procedures and staff training programmes.

e. Economic Outcomes: Economic evaluation indicated that the average cost of hospitalisation in the post implementation period had reduced. Cost savings were due to decreased length of stay, efficient utilisation of intensive care resources and fewer complications. Although it needed initial investment in training, the infrastructure of telemedicine, protocols creation, etc, it was compensated with the enhanced effectiveness of the operations and the use of resources.

VIII. DISCUSSION

The results of the current research prove that the combination of clinical and administrative strategies to stroke treatment can significantly enhance quality and efficiency of stroke patients (be it ischemic or hemorrhagic). Such results are in line with systems theories of acute care provision that have stressed the idea that the best stroke outcomes are achieved with synchronised, timely operations as opposed to clinical decisions taken in isolation. Disjointed healthcare systems have also been identified to cause delays and poor outcomes in treatment, and thus there is the need to implement integrated care models (14). Those measures were the major results of the study as the time-dependent indicators of the processes greatly improved after introduction of standardised clinical protocols and administrative coordination. It is specifically important that the door-to-imaging and door-to-treatment time are reduced, and the sooner reperfusion occurs the better neurological recovery would be functional. In terms of stroke management, time efficiency has been shown to be significant as previous findings have shown that every minute of untreated ischemic stroke is associated with the loss of a large number of neurons (15).

Better clinical outcomes of the patients with ischemic stroke have been correlated with those that have been reported by large scale meta-analyses that show that timely intravenous thrombolysis positively affects functional recovery (16). Equally, automated processes of thrombectomy indicate that systematic structures of care serve as key to successful endovascular therapy (17). In the case of hemorrhagic stroke, the standardised blood pressure management contributed to improvement of the stabilisation, which is consistent with the evidence presented in the INTERACT2 trial (18). These improvements and increased cost efficiency were further maintained by administrative governance, training and monitoring mechanisms and promotion of value of integrated stroke systems (19).

IX. CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that a combined clinical and administrative strategy would be of great help in management of ischemic and hemorrhagic stroke. Congruence between evidence-based clinical protocols and well-organised administrative systems enhanced care timeliness, clinical care and efficiency. System-level coordination of stroke care is important because reductions in treatment delays, improvements in functional outcomes, and optimization of resource utilisation are noted. Its results highlight that stroke management is not just a matter of clinical intervention but good governance, standard working protocols, and constant monitoring of performance is needed. Implementation of integrated stroke management models has the potential to help decrease morbidity and mortality and provide high-quality and sustainable stroke care provision.

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