Project Title: Exploring the development of web-based interventions to support the rehabilitation of stroke survivors and health-promoting behaviours of their caregivers in the community setting.

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Level: PhD

Background to the project:
Stroke is a major cause of mortality in the United Kingdom with around 111,000 people per year being newly diagnosed. Of the survivors, 50% will be left with significant, long-term effects. Rehabilitation of impairment rests with the OT who plays a vital role in enabling stroke patients to self-manage their condition and live optimally independent lives. Following a period of acute hospitalisation, the majority of stroke patients are swiftly discharged home (within 4-7 days) to be cared for within the community (home) setting. Managing the post-stroke functional difficulties can be challenging for both the stroke survivor and their caregivers. Whilst this cohort receives community-based rehabilitation for a short-term period of up to 6 weeks, it is acknowledged that that physical activity among those with stroke is low such sedentary lifestyles not only risks loss of functional gains achieved during rehabilitation but can also precipitate further functional decline. The move in focus from disability prevention to the prevention of secondary conditions, described as a ‘paradigm shift’ some years ago, has gained renewed interest due to national and regional guidelines emphasising the need for early supportive discharge and on-going rehabilitation within the home setting. There is a need to explore the development of health-promoting and rehabilitative interventions to support stroke survivors and their caregivers within the home setting that enable a greater focus to be given to overall health and well-being, enhanced functional independence and reduced environmental barriers to enhance quality of life over the longer-term.

Project aim: The aim of the project is to explore and develop web-based interventions to support the health-promoting behaviours and rehabilitation of stroke survivors and their caregivers.

Methods to be used:
The phases of the study are to:
1. Review and critique the international literature context of secondary prevention of stroke and health-promoting rehabilitative behaviours using a systematic review methodology;
2. Explore the barriers and facilitators to engaging in rehabilitation and health-promoting behaviours within the home setting as experienced by stroke survivors using qualitative methodologies;
3. Explore the barriers and facilitators to promoting rehabilitation and personal health-promoting behaviours within the home setting as experienced by caregivers of stroke survivors using qualitative methodologies;
4. Develop a web-based, rehabilitation intervention for stroke survivors using LifeGuide, an open source software tool;
5. Develop a web-based, health-promoting intervention for caregivers using LifeGuide, an open source software tool;
6. Pilot the intervention content and mode of delivery using a participatory workshop of stroke survivors and their caregivers.

The successful student will be embedded within an established research team who are currently working on an externally funded research study by the United Kingdom Occupational Therapy Research Foundation in upper limb stroke rehabilitation. A current PhD student is exploring the use of a web-based platform specifically to deliver upper-limb rehabilitation to stroke survivors within the home setting. This project will augment, and build further upon this ongoing body of work.

Skills required of the applicant: Applicants holding, or expecting to gain, a BSc (Hons) in Occupational Therapy or other rehabilitation-related area are eligible to apply for this programme of study.

References: