

# VSS

Volunteer Stroke Scheme

# News

Issue 7 May 1992

## Ann Kavanagh's Review

We have helped to set up several VSS groups over the past few years and thankfully they are all doing well.



As a result of invitations from Judith Thornton, Speech Therapist, Naas, Co Kildare and Dr R Corcoran, Director of Community Care, Theo Davis and I went to Naas to address a meeting of people interested in setting up a Stroke Scheme in their area. We were very heartened to find about sixty people present. We met stroke victims and members of their families. Speech Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Physio-therapists, District Nurses, Community Care Nurses and people representing the Health Board also attended in strength.

It was a pleasure to see so many professional people willing to give their time and encouragement to this venture. I was particularly impressed with the number of people interested in helping at any level. I do hope they do well. We will, of course, help in any way we can.

At present we are having our rules amended to facilitate an association by affiliation for all interested groups nationwide. We feel that now is the time to address this situation. We hope to have this work completed within the next three months. Our Honorary Secretary, Theo Davis, will notify all interested parties on completion.

I would like to thank all those who have helped us over the past year, particularly, our volunteers, including our working committee and our executive committee who give so much of their time and support in all our endeavours.

I would like to thank the Irish Epilepsy Association for facilitating us so whole-heartedly during the past year and wish them well. I would also like to thank the Stroke Association of Great Britain for their help and advice and continued friendship across the waves.

I wish all our friends and readers  
a healthy and happy 1992.

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## Puzzle Page

### Legs

Count the number of legs

eg	Three dogs	twelve	legs	12
	Four cats		legs	
	One farmer and two horses		legs	
	One bird		legs	
	One fly		legs	
	One tourist guide and fourteen tourists		legs	
	Two chairs		legs	
	Four tables		legs	
	Mr & Mrs Brown and their three daughters		legs	
	Total		legs	

If you are right the total is the same as the number of legs in five soccer football teams!

### Money

In this square there are 15 hidden words all connected with money matters.

A	C	B	P	R	I	C	E	C	T
T	O	U	D	R	E	Z	Y	V	A
R	I	D	R	C	O	S	T	E	X
E	W	P	F	R	G	F	H	Q	A
C	H	E	Q	U	E	B	I	L	L
E	W	U	W	I	E	N	L	T	X
I	A	C	A	S	H	A	C	F	X
P	G	J	S	A	L	A	R	Y	M
T	E	D	I	S	C	O	U	N	T

The words are horizontal, vertical, or diagonal. Hints:

Horizontal

PRICE

Vertical

RECEIPT

Diagonal

TIP

### Unscramble

Can you unscramble the names of these Irish counties?

THULO  
AYOM  
CROWLA

RACEL  
NOWD  
WAGYAL

GOSIL

HARMAG  
ROYTEN  
VANCA

## How stroke victims get help to help themselves

Padraig Ó Moráin

Christmas, 1988, the Grants came home from buying the presents. Ben went upstairs and Lily stayed downstairs wrapping them. She heard a sound of something falling upstairs but paid no heed to it. About an hour later, Ben came downstairs. "What's wrong?" she asked. She looked up when he repeated the question and she knew something serious had happened. She got Ben to sit down in a chair and then she called their daughter and they phoned for an ambulance.

All Ben could say was, "What's wrong?" and he kept repeating it. She knows now that what he was trying to say was, "what's wrong with me?"

What was wrong with him was that he had had a stroke which was to keep him in hospital for the next nine months. He emerged with very little speech, unable to walk and with epilepsy.

"The day he came home from the hospital he had nine epileptic fits," says Lily. "I didn't know what to do. I didn't realise he was panicking too, which was making him have one attack after another."

Lily rang the hospital and spoke to the ward sister, Claire Maddock. She called around in her own time, after work, to attend Ben and advise them both. The Grants still send her flowers every St. Valentine's Day.

Like anybody who suddenly found themselves virtually unable to talk or walk, Ben avoided contact with other people and with relatives. If visitors called, Ben would leave the room after 10 minutes.

Then his speech therapist got in touch with the Volunteer Stroke Scheme, and one of its supervisors, Marie O'Brien, was sent to call.

VSS is a voluntary group with two paid supervisors. Its 90 volunteers counsel people with strokes and their families, work with them, especially where there is a speech difficulty, run a club which can help people with strokes to get back into social life, and run support groups for relatives and children.

Lily says that she learned from Marie that Ben would have to develop his independence. After all, she says, "if anything happened to me he would have to function on his own."

Marie O'Brien sent Kevin, a voluntary worker, to Ben. For the first several visits, Kevin sat and listened, something which persons with speech impediments encounter all too rarely, as others fail to listen or, instead, finish their sentences for them.

Then he encouraged Ben to walk around the block



with him and, later, on his own.

The next step was to get Ben to go to the VSS club. Ben was reluctant because of the epilepsy. "I was worried," he says. "I was afraid that if I went into the club that I would take a seizure."

But Marie O'Brien kept on badgering until he gave in. Now he takes part in club activities and outings and seems to have lost much of his fear of epileptic seizures, which are down to about two a month.

The outings are important. "The hardest thing when this happens to you is to go out in public, to eat in a restaurant, for instance," says Lily. "You begin to think you are not acceptable." The outings help to break down that fear.

Ben speaks very well today and can walk with the help of a walking aid. He wears an SOS bracelet which is recognisable to hospital staff and which contains details of his medical condition. "It takes the fear out of going out," he says of the bracelet. It means that if he has a seizure and people think, for instance, that he has simply had too much to drink, the hospital, instead of putting him in a corner to sleep it off, will get the necessary information in the bracelet to help treat him.

The Volunteer Stroke Scheme, which was founded in 1983 with the help of a start-up grant from the British Chest, Heart and Stroke Association, works closely with doctors, nurses and speech therapists. It is a valuable community care service. Yet, its Health Board grant is only £12,000 a year and many of its activities have to take place in members' homes. They recently had to drop the idea of holding a meeting in a hotel because they could not afford the price of the room.

Out of that £12,000 they pay the salaries of their two supervisors and other expenses. They had hoped to get money from the National Lottery allocation to the Department of Health to pay for a supervisor in the Tallaght area, but they got nothing. Yet, they save the state a fortune through the work they do for people with strokes.

The Volunteer Stroke Scheme can be contacted at 249 Crumlin Road, Dublin 12, telephone 01-557455. Information on similar schemes outside Dublin can be obtained from the same address.

*This article by Padraig Ó Moráin was first published in the Irish Times on 14 January, 1992, in a Social Sort of Column. There was a fine photograph of a smiling Ben Grant chatting with Ann Kavanagh.*



## An Up-date on the Dublin Northside Stroke Club

by Erica O'Mara, Organizer North Dublin

In most items of patchwork, there is a common thread of colour or texture running through it. As far as the Monday Club and the Wednesday Club go the common thread is the link of friendship between each stroke person, volunteer and driver. This friendship warms, gladdens and so often erupts into laughter that eases the frustrations of an inability to communicate with words.

The following pieces are some of the "Special Occasions" of our Club Year. On a Monday in May, 1991, Alan Brown came back to the Club for a visit. Since his wife Mary died 18 months ago Alan has been in St. Mary's Hospital. He got a great welcome in the Club especially from Bert, his partner at draughts.

The domino players go ahead each week with great concentration and serious deliberation - a few close-ups would make some smashing photographs - especially the day I forgot the dominoes!

In July we had Mass in the Club offered by Fr. Feargal with special prayers for Violet Dykes who had suffered several further strokes and who died a couple of weeks later. Vi was so quiet but enjoyed Club so much and really appreciated her award presented by President Mary Robinson last year.

Our summer outing was a great success, including both Clubs. We went to Springfield Hotel in Leixlip who put up a beautiful meal and also gave a great service in a very cheerful way. Fr. Jack and Fr. Feargal from Kilmore Parish were able to come as well as Sr. Margaret and many friends and relatives. We had 75 in total and without doubt all 75 enjoyed themselves immensely.

Early September saw us back in Club after the summer break but as we were a small group, Sr. Margaret lent us the minibus and Chris Sherwin drove us around the coast of North Dublin in the early autumn sunshine.

At the end of September we had two visitors from Cork - Lorna Barrett, who is a speech therapist and Frances Banks, relative of a stroke person. Both are on the committee of the Cork Stroke Scheme who plan to start a stroke club.

November saw Maggie Cook's 81st birthday. Normally we try to mark the decades but last year Maggie kept very quiet about her birthday even with her own family! So we made up for lost time and had a card, a present and a cake with candles (just a few - not 81). Maggie was thrilled.



Erica O'Mara and Marie O'Brien

December 16th was the day for our Christmas Mass and party and it must have been the best ever. Fr. Joe McHugh, who had a stroke himself, offered the Mass and Ann Kavanagh and Theo Davis were guests. Our meal was really superb and had been prepared by Christy Nolan.

The entertainment was something else, as they say in the States. The team was made up of stroke people and volunteers and they were really splendid with the star item performed by Brendan Murphy and Tess Harrington. It was a skit on "Sonny Boy" with Brendan singing it straight first and then being joined by Tess as "Sonny Boy" himself. We all laughed until we cried.

Earlier Bert had been asked to do SANTA and that could also have been termed the performance of the evening. Bert really entered into the part with enthusiasm giving a great bear hug and a hearty kiss to one and all. He could have a permanent annual job!

In the new year, 1992, some new equipment was purchased by the Club and different items were tried out successfully. A manicure box was put together and Bernie, one of our volunteers, spends most of her Club time doing nailcare - very popular with everyone. Some sketches with just a bare outline were done and enthusiastically completed. A new game of "Stick Bats" (with bats lined with velcro making it easy to catch the tennis ball) was very popular altogether.

On 25 March, 1992, we held the return Darts Match between the Wednesday Club in North Dublin and the South Dublin Club. The South Dublin Club arrived in strength bringing the trophy, which they victoriously brought home again, beating the North Dublin Club for the second time. There is always the next time! A good time was had by both Clubs, players and supporters alike.

Sadly, a very popular member of our Monday Club died recently - Clem Loscher. He will be remembered by all who knew him, particularly for his singing of "The Rare Old Times" and many other good songs. May you rest in peace, Clem.

It has taken many Monday mornings to put together these memories.

Hopefully the year ahead will see us provide happy times for each other and strength to comfort each other in the sad times.

## Dublin Southside Stroke Club

Marie O'Brien, Supervisor, South Dublin

Two VSS Clubs got together for a friendly Darts match in 1991. The Wednesday North Dublin and Thursday South Dublin VSS Clubs held a friendly Darts Match in July 1991.

The match got off to a good start with both Captains keeping their teams on their toes. Paul Fitzpatrick captained Northside and Liam Corrigan captained Southside. The tension mounted, both sides were neck and neck until Kathleen McClory threw the winning dart.

The trophy, donated by Ann Kavanagh, was accepted by Liam Corrigan on behalf of the Southside Club. Not being let away with just looking on, both organisers had a go. Erica O'Meara from Northside won with a flourish so on the day the honours were shared.

The Southside VSS had a locum organiser, Teresa Murphy, who "held the fort" while Marie O'Brien was on leave. Many thanks to Teresa for a job well done. Thankfully Teresa has agreed to stay with the Club as a volunteer.

On the 30th May, 1991, a return visit to Glendalough took place. A word of special thanks to the Wicklow Heather Restaurant, Laragh, for their excellent meal and courteous service. A drive over the mountains, accompanied by plenty of singing on board our bus and a visit to the Lake at Glendalough made for a successful outing.



Kay Hammond, Nora McLennon, Liam Corrigan

As usual Michael Ryder entertained us all and Jimmy Kelly played like a lark on his mouth organ.

It was a warm day. There was singing and dancing at the lakeside and a bit of comedy thrown in - mainly by Michael Ryder. It was a thoroughly successful outing. On our return we stopped to celebrate Kate Kavanagh's birthday.



A special word of appreciation to Kate Kavanagh for all her help and hard work while working with the VSS. Kate has now retired and will be sadly missed.

On 25th July, 1991, we paid a return visit to the Glen of Imaal, Co. Wicklow. Once again, Fenton's Lounge gave us a hearty welcome, going out of their way to help serve lunch and even providing us with refreshments.



Seamus Thomas, Tommy Curran, Siamus O'Brien

We celebrated our 1st Birthday with an outing to the Royal Marine Hotel, Dun Laoghaire on 5th September, 1991. A year book showing all our activities was put together for the occasion.

Our Christmas Dinner was a great success and thanks to Theo Davis we now have our party on record in video form.



Santa Claus (Michael Ryder again) made a surprise visit with gifts for all. This year Jimmy Palmer entertained us with two comedy monologues - ( we think Jimmy ought to audition for a spot at the The Point Depot).

Volunteer and relatives meetings were held throughout the year. Home visits are a very important facility provided by the VSS. These consist of working with a speech therapist's work plan and can include hobbies, short outings, reading, writing, 'news items', cards and any other activities which suit the client. These visits are very important to the stroke person and volunteers derive great satisfaction from seeing the fruits of their labours.

We have a great need for home volunteers, club volunteers and drivers. Many people are only waiting to be asked.

Club activities consist of fortnightly physiotherapy sessions and thanks to our Physiotherapist we now have a 15 minute tape which we can use every week ourselves. Other activities are dominoes, quizzes, bingo, word-games, word jig-saws, painting corner, darts, skittles, stick ball and, shortly, we hope to introduce indoor bowls.

A very special word of thanks to all our southside volunteers, both home and club, and drivers for all their hard work and dedication in 1991.

### **Peggy McCormick's Story of her Stroke** as told to Erica O'Mara

I had a stroke in 1987 and still haven't a clue what happened when I collapsed with it. I was in Jervis Street Hospital for five months. At first when I asked the nurse if I could go to the bathroom she said she would bring me a bedpan. I replied that I didn't want one and she told me I couldn't walk because I was paralysed on one side. I didn't believe that and tried to get out of bed and, of course, I fell.

I had physiotherapy in hospital but felt they forget about you when you go home. The family were very upset at my stroke. My husband Paddy has been very good and my youngest daughter Emer was able to bath me.

Going out I felt everyone was looking at me and I was embarrassed going to our local church and now go to one further away. Our friends altered after my stroke and some of them stopped coming to see me.



*Peggy McCormick*

Stroke made me feel old until Erica came to see me. Going to the Club has been very good for me and I feel it would be an advantage for any stroke person. The outings are very good

I am more independent now. I can wash my own hair. Paddy drives me to the shopping centre and I do my own shopping and I can also cook the dinner. I found the subtitles with the News for the Deaf are good for helping with reading.

I have felt very bitter since my stroke. Recently I travelled on my own to London to my daughter and this helped my confidence and took away some of that bitterness. I feel now, that if I had the money, I could travel anywhere.

My advice to anyone is - don't expect miracles. Stroke happens in five minutes, but recovery is very slow.



## The Westmeath Stroke Scheme

Catherine Rutledge

### Athlone Club

The Athlone Club meet on the first Tuesday of each month in the Presbytery, Athlone. Over the past few months there has been a great increase in members attending.

Recently, Athlone Taxis have offered free transport to any stroke patient needing it. Their format for their get-together is a chat, some entertainment, a musician, sing-song etc. They finish off with a nice cup of tea and cakes etc. They also arrange a special Christmas Party. Pauline Brophy is P.R.O.

### Mullingar Club

The Mullingar Club meet on the fourth Tuesday of each month in the Parish Community Centre, Mullingar. There's a very good attendance. We begin with bingo which we really enjoy. Then there is either music or sing-song, a free raffle and we finish off with a cup of tea and cakes.

In July 1991, we went on a scenic tour of Delvin, Fore, Castlepollard, Multyfarnham and ended up in Tormey's of Bunbrosna for afternoon tea and music and songs supplied by locals. A great day was had by all.

Apart from the two clubs, Westmeath Stroke Scheme invite all stroke people from the county to a Summer Get-together in early June. In 1991, the venue was The Rustic Inn, Abbeyshrule on 9th June. All enjoyed a lovely meal, chat, lots of music and song.

Then on the 6th July, a small group of our members received an invitation to Arus an Uachtarain to attend the presentation of the President's Trophy to members of the Red Cross. It was a marvellous day for all who travelled and met Mary Robinson.



Picture of Mullingar VSS Group taken in the grounds of Aras an Uachtarain with President Mary Robinson seated at the table.

On 8th December 1991, the Annual Christmas Party was held in Bloomfield House Hotel. After a lovely meal, Santa Claus paid a visit to all stroke people present. Then lots of music, songs and dance brought the evening to a happy ending of a great day.

Sadly, some of our members and volunteers have passed on to their eternal rest in the past year. We extend sincere sympathy to their relatives and friends. May I take this opportunity to thank each and everyone who supported us and helped in any way. Continued health and happiness to all members.

### Committee:

<b>Chairman</b>	Frank Bolger, Newlands, Mullingar	Ph 044-42068
<b>Secretary</b>	Mary Mahon, Bellview Heights, Mullingar	Ph 044-43057
<b>Treasurer</b>	James Kincaid Rathconnell	Ph 044-40960
<b>P.R.O.</b>	Catherine Rutledge, Irishtown, Mullingar	Ph 044-42366

### Liam MacColla

Liam died on the 1 September, 1991, exactly two years after he suffered a stroke. He was 73 years. Liam was a strong supporter of the VSS. In 1990, he prepared some of the questions for the Quiz in VSS News. Last year, he wrote "Patient Progress". He joined in the VSS South Dublin outing to Glendalough in May, 1991. He enjoyed the friendship and the fun of that day. He quoted this prayer in last year's VSS News and here it is again:

*"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
and to change the things I can  
and the wisdom to know the difference."*

The VSS salutes a noble soul. May he rest in peace.



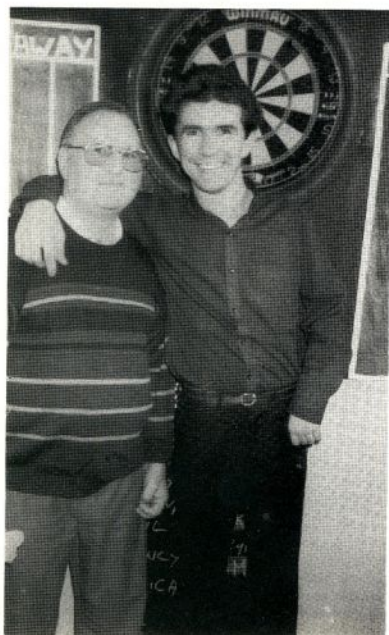
*Sr. Margaret*



*Ben Grant and Liam Corrigan*



*Liam Corrigan acc*



*Liam Corrigan (Sth side)  
Paul Fitzpatrick (Nth side)*



*Ann Copeland and Bernie Horan*



*Left to right: Brendan Dillon, Michael Reid,  
Eileen Reilly and Ada Hutchinson*



# STROKE SCHEME

## THEIR MANY FUNCTIONS DURING THE YEAR



Winning Darts Trophy



Kathleen McClorey



The manicurist Bernie Fitzgerald working



Bridget and Arthur Young



Michael and Margaret, Glen of Imaal



Paddy McLoughlin



Left to right: Bob Blake, Beatrice McLoughlan  
and Brendan Murphy

## The Gift of Eloquence

by Michael Ryder



In the sixteenth century, Queen Elizabeth I tried to buy Blarney Castle in County Cork. When discussing the purchase, Queen Elizabeth said of the owner "What he means he doesn't say and what he says he doesn't mean. It's all a load of Blarney." Hence the saying 'a load of Blarney'. If you kiss the Blarney Stone you are supposed to get the gift of eloquence.

Every man, woman and child born, bred and reared in Dublin's inner city, particularly the Liberties, must have kissed the Blarney Stone for they certainly have the gift. If you could eavesdrop and listen to them it is as good an education as you could get anywhere. The conversation will usually go something like this:

*"He was coming from the boozier, stocious, well-oiled, filled to the gills he was. I don't know where he gets the readies from. That's his weakness, his failing since his father passed on. His MUDDER is still in St. Kevin's very old now but she still has all her FACILITIES. That sister of his has a face like a beggin' ass to every cat, dog and devil. Her poor husband is all fell in with the hunger - he has a face the colour of suet. Now you know me, I'm not one for giving scandal or talking about people. Wait till I tell yeh, you'll drop dead when yeh hear it..."*

You can hear conversations like this in most parts of Dublin. If you have a Saturday free, do take a trip to Dublin's Liberties. I guarantee you will enjoy listening in to these good-natured warm-hearted, heart of the rowl people.

Did you know that 'heart of the rowl' comes from a pipe or twist tobacco that was in a coil or a roll that had to be cut. The outside was dry and brittle but the centre or heart was soft and pliable and people always asked for the 'heart of the rowl' in pure Dublinese.

That was Dublin City in the rare aul' times!

## That Special Minute.

by Sheila McMahon, Westmeath

I remember when I was only a tot,  
Mother would bring me down to the shop,  
And just outside the church she'd stand,  
And "Come in" she'd say clutching my hand,  
*"Just for a minute"*

And when I started going to school,  
She'd bring me there as a rule,  
But first the steps of the church we'd climb,  
She'd say: "We'll go in, I think we'll have time,  
*"Just for a minute"*

When I got big, I mean seven years old,  
I went in for myself, for was I not told,  
When you're passing the church, don't forget to  
call,  
And tell Our Lord about lessons and all,  
*"Just for a minute"*

There are things inside of me, bad and good,  
That nobody knows and nobody could,  
Excepting "Our Lord", but I want him to know,  
For He helps, when for a visit I'd go,  
*"Just for a minute"*

He finds it lonely when nobody comes,  
You'd find it the same if you had no chums,  
And He's pleased when anyone passing the way,  
Drops in to bid him the time of the day,  
*"Just for a minute"*

I don't know what happens when people die,  
But I won't be scared - I'll tell you why -  
When Our Lord is judging my soul, I feel,  
He'll remember the time I went in to kneel,  
*"Just for a minute"*

## A General Perspective on Stroke Care

by Catherine McCann M.I.C.S.P.

I was delighted to be asked to write for your magazine and my contribution will be as a physiotherapist, but from a personal point of view. I am now thirty years working in my profession and during that time I have come in contact with many people who have had strokes. In many instances I have also had involvement with their families.

My particular interest now is in the stages after the acute and active rehabilitation phases have ended. Obviously, how people get on in the long run will depend on the severity of the stroke itself and on the person's management in that early period. But there are also many psychological factors to be considered by all involved in each particular case.

### Early Phase

I commence this article with a brief word about that early phase. If a stroke is reasonably severe, the person is normally hospitalised and their care is managed by a multi-disciplinary team. My experience of the Dublin hospital scene is that the quality of this care is good. However, I do feel that there is one weakness that could be improved - namely, more involvement of family. Such involvement from day one, if possible, is essential. Involvement of relatives plays a huge part and determines in the long run whether maximum recovery, in the fullest sense of the word, is obtained and maintained over the years to come. Close family members need to be given the necessary psychological help and insight required to cope with the often dramatic changes that a stroke can bring.

A stroke deeply affects not only the persons themselves but also their families. Support is necessary in helping everyone concerned to work through what has happened. The ideal is that a sense of both idealism and hope is fostered at all stages of recovery and after. It is not easy to get this balance of hope and realism right either by the person, their family or even by the health professionals concerned.

### Recovery Period

Following the usually short acute phase, there comes the recovery period when rehabilitation takes place. Progress in the beginning is normally rapid but later slows down. The rate and amount of recovery depends on a number of factors, such as the severity of the lesion, the person's age, their former health, etc. It also depends on the support, understanding and realistic encouragement they receive from the people close to them.

In the rehabilitation period, hard work from the person, therapists and others involved can lead to the regaining of a lot of function. This can range from, to being partial or even minimal.



Catherine McCann

### Family Involvement

Key family members need to get involved at each stage of the recovery process. This requires gaining knowledge and insight into the nature of a stroke and their relative's stroke in particular. Each stroke is unique and produces its own set of problems. The individual is also unique and will react and cope in his or her own way. Family members must also be taught the skills required to help their relative and gain the confidence necessary to use these skills through practice.

Health professionals, therefore, must spend time with families, facilitating this process of confidence-building, teaching skills and imparting insight. The person with the stroke goes through a huge upheaval and he or she has to try to adjust emotionally and physically to what has happened. This brings with it inevitable mood swings - delight when the function improves and feelings of frustration and despair at either the lack of recovery or the slowness of recovery.

During the latter part of the rehabilitation phase, the level of disability that the person is likely to be left with emerges. Usually this only slowly becomes evident to both the person and the family. In my experience, there are few who can face this reality at this stage. It takes more time and a lot of support. Facing the truth is very difficult and needs sensitive handling. All through this period there is usually considerable help from a variety of health care personnel.

### Anxiety Levels

Anxiety levels can rise as the rehabilitation phase draws to a close.

Firstly, the level of activity around the stroke person is curtailed, e.g. there are no more investigations, less visits from the doctor, etc. This can increase the fearful feelings attached to going home. The stay in hospital can last normally from six weeks to six months. The most useful recovery in all people with strokes takes place within the first six months, but recovery does continue up to two years and sometimes longer.

Secondly, when the time of discharge approaches, the thoughts of going home, while pleasant, can also be fearful. "How will I manage?" is the spoken or unspoken question. How will I manage in so many areas - activities of daily life, socially, work, leisure pursuits, etc.

Some may be fortunate to have some step-down facility added to their care - some have none. But the day comes for all when they are finally discharged home.



Some may attend a form of out-patient service for a while, such as a day hospital, where the security of the link with the hospital is continued. But an end comes to that also. It would be ideal, in my opinion, if some form of Outpatient Rehabilitation Service were available to all people with strokes, on a phased-down basis for that first two years after the stroke. This, as far as I am aware, is not at present available anywhere in Ireland.

#### **The Patient and the Family on their own**

When, finally, all institutional support strings are cut, the person and family are on their own. But I add immediately this is not entirely true. There are community services available, but the extent of these largely depends on where the person lives. The ideal, of course, is that the person and their family on leaving the care situation, either as an in-patient or out-patient, have adjusted well and have learned to cope with the limitations brought on by the disability. To have achieved such adjustment and coping ability at this point is asking a lot of everyone. It may or may not have happened. Accepting and learning to cope with a stroke is a process which for many is a life-long one.

In my experience, it is not the actual level of disability which is the main factor in determining who copes well and who does not. Rather, it is the outlook and attitudes of the entire family unit, including the person with the stroke, that is decisive.

Some people with a lot of disability 'overcome' it by maximising on the function they do have and mentally deciding that they will live life to the full despite their limitations. This requires an ability to focus more on what they can do, rather than on what they cannot do. Other people, even with less residual disability, can do less well, by failing to work towards acceptance. For such people, often their world becomes small and closes in around them.

The secret, in my view, on how to live with a stroke, as with many other problems where the situation cannot be changed, is to work gradually towards acceptance. It takes time, usually requires help, but is essential if a worthwhile life is to ensue. Having a stroke is like a bereavement - the person has to learn to say 'good-bye'. In this instance, 'good-bye' has to be said to certain functions no longer achievable. It is a painful process, but there is a way out if the stages of grieving are gone through.

#### **Stages of Grieving**

The stages of grieving are denial, anger, bargaining, depression and finally acceptance. At first, the person with the stroke denies the reality of the situation, then gets angry. After that, there is the bargaining period which often lasts a while.

It can be with God, themselves, or other people. This is followed by depression. A period of depression is almost inevitable for a while. But if this is understood by all as a natural step on the way through to acceptance, then, hopefully, this period will be short and not too severe. Finally and again hopefully, the person (and family) after this difficult journey, will arrive at acceptance. Full acceptance may not be achieved - but some level of it will make the situation more liveable with. The greater the acceptance the greater the chance of a fuller life.

#### **Acceptance**

Having a stroke is not the same as losing a limb. So while a person must learn to say goodbye to a function, they must also be helped at the same time to 'befriend' the not fully functioning limb. Indeed, it is helpful if the person can make 'friends with' the affected side of the body. Rejection is not good, especially when it is rejection of part of one's own body. It affects the image a person has of themselves and this in turn affects how he or she relates to other people.

It is good if the person can go as far as befriending his or her total self - the 'me-who-has-had-a-stroke'. It is not the end of the world. Some of the most alive people I know are confined to wheel-chairs, some even since birth. It is the person's attitude which is all-important, i.e. managing 'me-with-a-stroke' or 'my-relative-with-a-stroke'. Families have also to work towards acceptance. It doesn't just 'happen'.

When a certain acceptance and befriending has been achieved, people with strokes should take themselves off the ill list. The person may still have some dependency needs i.e. where help is needed in the performance of some activities, but this does not denote illness. Small children have dependency requirements, but they are not considered sick. People with strokes can get ill like anyone else but most of the time they are not ill. They should not allow themselves, or other people to see them as 'sick'.

Families too should not have an illness outlook. One way of showing this is by not giving unnecessary help - the great rehabilitation dictum is - 'Never do something for someone that they can do for themselves'. But a corollary is also true - 'Never ask people to do what they cannot do'. If families continue to look on their relative as ill, then illness behaviour can be a consequence and this is certainly not desirable.

Sometimes, if this happens, individuals use their stroke as a 'crutch' which they hang on to for the rest of their lives.

As I have already said, the process towards recovery is not easy. People need to be gentle with themselves in facing negative feelings and working

Recently, I had the experience of a broken collar-bone. One arm was strapped to my side and so it was out of action for a while. As I learnt to do everything with one hand I often thought of people with strokes. I had to manage as I live alone.

It was an interesting experience. More interesting, though, was some of the things that I learnt about myself. I discovered that in the moments of self-pity - where my self-talk was 'poor me' - I did not cope well and the situation became bleak. Most of the time I did manage to get on with it and make the best of the situation. I do know it is more difficult for people with strokes. My arm would get better, theirs might not - but there were lessons that I learned.

The 'poor me' phrase and the comment 'why me' are destructive. They pull a person down and often pull down with them the people living close to them.

I always feel sad as a therapist, when, a year, maybe many years after a person has had a stroke, I hear them say: 'why did it happen to me?' It is sad too when one hears 'if only' or 'when I get better' several years post-stroke.

The majority of people who get strokes are not young. So added to the stroke trauma is facing the ageing process. The very suddenness of the stroke can propel a person more quickly into the older years, without giving the normal time for adjusting.

### **Creativity and enjoyment**

Creativity on the part of the person and the family can be a great help enabling people to look at new ways of doing things. There are often different ways. Also certain types of aids may be beneficial. Trying to do totally new things is also to be encouraged.

Enjoyment is vital and whatever fosters this must be earnestly sought. It is important that people do not cut themselves off from others and face situations as far as possible. Indeed, it can be very helpful when people can reach out beyond themselves to help other people. Learning to become a giver again can be very beneficial.

Obviously, the social area is more difficult for those with speech or hearing impairment but again, an attempt to save people from turning in on themselves must be assiduously worked at by encouraging them to become involved in some way with people.

It is important that each one looks after general health - seeing that they have adequate rest and exercise and a suitable diet.

Overweight and underweight should be avoided and a level of fitness appropriate to the person's age and condition should be maintained or regained if lost. A good sense of physical and mental well-being greatly helps a person who has had a stroke.

### **Family Carers**

A final word for family carers. It is vital at all stages of 'stroke' spoken about in this article that individual family members look after their own physical and mental health. It is bound to be at times a stressful situation but if it is to be managed well it is important that family members come together to share the care as best suits that family.

Too often the burden is left to one or two persons. These are almost always the women in the family. This needs to change. When families co-operate in sharing the care it is astonishing what can be achieved for the person with the stroke. I have seen also in this situation where the family themselves benefit including, at times, the grandchildren. Family members can be drawn closer together - qualities of character are elicited, such as generosity and caring, that might never have come to the fore, or, have been noticed within their own family. When families are creative and pool their resources, both personal and financial, it is truly amazing what can come about.

It is essential that carers care for their own health. This includes looking after their physical fitness levels. As with their relative who has had the stroke, they too must work at keeping fit for the task on hand and therefore they should have adequate rest and exercise and a suitable diet.

Especially, they should take responsibility for their mental health. One essential requirement for this is that they make time for themselves. It is important that they get away at times from the caring environment and have some time for personal leisure pursuits. The more demanding the care required, the more vital it is that these steps be taken.

### **A Positive Note**

Finally, to end on a positive note. Not all is bleak when a member of the family has a stroke. There are positive aspects to every stressful situation and everyone is helped if they can at times focus on some of these.

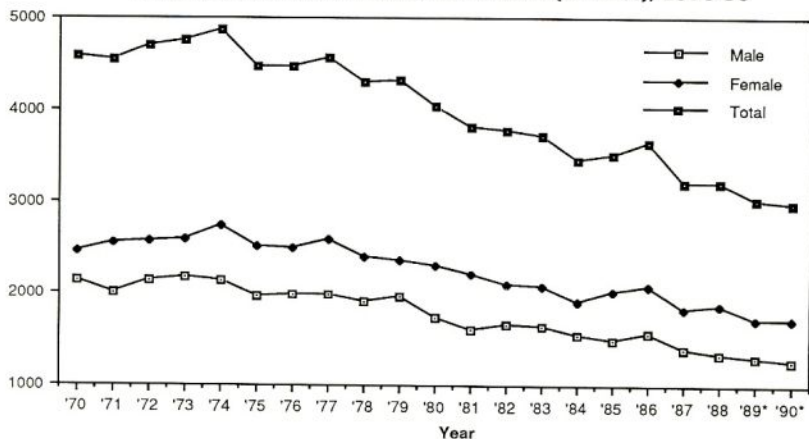
For example, people meet people they would never have met otherwise, and friendships are often formed. People discover inner strengths that might never have surfaced. Values change, often for the better and life in general is viewed with a different perspective.

## A Change for the Better in the Irish Figures for Stroke Deaths

by John L'Estrange

The report on Vital Statistics of deaths due to Cerebrovascular disease (Strokes) from 1970 to 1990 published by The Central Statistics Office makes some interesting reading ( see Figure )

**Deaths due to Cerebrovascular Disease (Strokes), 1970-90**



There was a slight rise of about 6% from 1970 to 1974. There was then a gradual, but definite, fall from 1975 to 1990 - a fall of about 40%. In 1990 the total fell below 3,000 for the first time. In males and females the pattern was very similar, the males being less than the females by about 500 a year.

Why the drop in the numbers of deaths since 1975? Better hospital care, better nutrition and less smoking may be some of the reasons. However further research is needed in this area. Let us hope that the welcome downward trend will continue.

## St. Stephen's Days Past

By John F. McLoughlin

When I woke up last St. Stephen's Day  
My thoughts went back to distant days of yore  
When the wren boys came a-calling  
To our old home in Annaghmore.

They played fiddles, flutes and melodeons  
Tambourines and snare drums  
And one thing was certain  
The wren boys would always come

They didn't get much money  
But put on quite a show  
Far better than you'd ever hear.  
On T.V. or radio.

They wore curtains on their faces  
As a sort of a disguise  
But we always knew who they were  
By their hair or voice or eyes.

These are the memories of St. Stephen's Day I have  
And which now can be no more  
For there are no wren boys  
And there's no-one resident in the homestead of  
Annaghmore.

(John McLoughlin suffered a stroke in 1988. Last year  
we published another of his poems)



## Money Matters John L'Estrange Reports

We had another good year on the financial front, beating last year's total by well over a thousand pounds.

1 The Eastern Health Board gave us £12,000 for 1991, for which we express our grateful thanks. We have been expanding every year since 1984. The Eastern Health Board should now have another look at us to see where we are going from here.

2 A wide range of commercial firms helped us once again e.g. banks, building societies, insurance companies, travel agents, manufacturing firms and retail outlets. The chief companies who helped us are listed below in alphabetical order:

Abbot Laboratories Aer Rianta Allied Irish Banks Amdahl Computers An Bord Bainne Arnotts B&I Line Bank of Ireland Becton Dickinson Bristol-Myers Squibb Burmah-Castrol Bus Eireann Calor Kosangas Ciba-Geigy Clerys Creans	P. V. Doyle, Hotels Dunnes Stores Educational Building Society E.S.B. Esso Gallagher General Accident General Motor Distribution Glaxo Guinness Hoechst I.B.M. Inter City Irish Rail Irish Cement Irish Life Irish Permanent Building Society	Jones Oil (given by Ita Reid Smith) Jurys Hotel Marks and Spencers New Ireland Assurance Odlums P.M.P.A. Roches Stores Royal Insurance R.T.E. Sealink Siemens Smurfits Ulster Bank Wellcome
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3 On Saturday 4 May 1991 we had our "Plant and Shrub Sale" under the expert eye of Ray O'Haire (Horticulture, UCD). A number of commercial garden centres helped us in getting off the ground. To those and to my family, many thanks for making it a terrific day.

7 A table quiz was held in UCD, Belfield on 27 November 1991. It was organized by a committee which included Anne Kelliher, Art Cosgrove and Gerry Horkan, all from UCD. Art's son and Gerry's son did Trojan work as well in getting everything to work well.

4 On Thursday 26 September 1991, HMV, under Chris Roche's guidance organised a concert in the National Concert Hall in aid of VSS and Helping Hand. The Lord Mayor of Dublin, Sean Kenny, was present. Anne Copeland, who is on our VSS Committee was also present. Really it was a spectacular event. The artists included Dave Lalor, Finbar Furey, Sandra Kelly, Donovan, Finbar Wright, Christie Hennessy and Tommy Makem. The show was compered by Anne Doyle and Larry Gogan. On Saturday 28 September 1991 RTE did a recording of the programme.

1st prize	Team from Political Economy
2nd prize	Team from Mathematics
3rd prize	Team from Library
(divided)	Team from Agriculture

A painting presented for auction by Maureen Belton (UCD retired) was the highlight.

5 While Ben Grant was being interviewed for "How stroke victims get help to help themselves" his wife Lily was collecting for VSS in Slim In. It was a terrific job involving much work over the summer months.

8 Another VSS quiz was run by Tina Kelly and Lorna Smith in November 1991 in Marine Hotel, Coolock, Dublin 5. The quiz master was Brian Monaghan and helpers included Lyndie Taylor and her friend Sarah. They had 30 teams of four people and it was a tremendous success. To Cadbury Ireland, where Tina and Lorna work, we would like to thank all the staff for putting on such an excellent show.

6 A gala bridge drive was held on 13 October 1991 in the Foxrock Community Hall. The tournament directors were Maurice O'Connor and Jim Nolan. Bride Murphy of the VSS Committee spoke a few kind words. A special word of thanks is due to Dermot Ryder, secretary of Foxrock Bridge Club, who presented all the prizes at the end of the night.

Once again I say to the friends of VSS, both North and South:

**You have done us proud.**

## Volunteer Stroke Scheme

249 Crumlin Road  
Dublin 12

Phone: 01-557455  
Fax: 01-557013  
Registered Charity CHY 6989

### Committee

Chairperson: Ann Kavanagh  
Vice-Chairperson: Gina O'Donohue  
Secretary: Theo Davis  
Treasurer: Anne Tuite  
Liaison Officer: Joan Monahan

Members: John Annesley  
Marie Coldrick  
John L'Estrange  
Brendan Murphy  
Bride Murphy  
Chris Sherwin

### Editorial Committee:

John L'Estrange (Editor)  
Michael McGinley

### Supervisors:

Marie O'Brien  
Erica O'Mara

## Aims of the Volunteer Stroke Scheme

- 1 To help people who suffer from speech and allied problems as a result of a stroke.
- 2 To offer each patient a small team of volunteers who will visit singly for about an hour at a time on a regular weekly basis.
- 3 To provide a club where patients can meet and be further helped.
- 4 To provide outings from time to time.
- 5 To create a greater awareness and understanding of stroke through effective and relevant publicity.

**Subscription £5.00 a year**

VSS News is distributed to hospitals and Health Boards throughout the country free of charge. Organisations requiring copies of VSS News please contact the Editor at 249 Crumlin Road, Dublin 12 (phone 01-557455), between 10.00 am and 12.30 pm on Monday, Wednesday or Thursday.

More **volunteers** and **drivers** are required by the VSS. Contact us at the number given above or write for further information.

I wish to subscribe to the Volunteer Stroke Scheme and I enclose £5.00 for 1992.

Name: .....

Address: .....  
.....  
.....

Phone: .....

Cheques should be made payable to the Volunteer Stroke Scheme.

Signed: .....

Date: .....