

Clive's story

In November 2015, at age 52, I Clive Kempson suffered a stroke. I remember being admitted to hospital, and spending 10 days on the stroke ward while undergoing a battery of tests, all to no avail. No one could tell me what had caused his stroke.

Unable to stand unassisted, with no use of my right arm or leg, and experiencing speech problems, I was transferred to an in-patient rehab facility for just over four weeks. This was a scary time for me, as it became apparent to me that my recovery was going to be a long, hard road, and I was worried about what the future would hold.

Before my stroke, I was a small business owner, installing and servicing electronic security systems in the commercial, government and industrial sectors. Following the stroke, I was forced to decline two contracts we had been awarded, valued at \$250,000. My confidence and self-worth took a big hit as a result, and I was now weighed down by thoughts of not finishing projects, letting down clients, money worries, and what the impact of this would have on my family.

It is at this point I felt I would have benefited from a consultation with a mental health professional. However, I had no contact with a mental health professional at any time during my hospital stays. I was never offered a mental health assessment.

The team of health professionals I had working with me were doing a great job, but they were focused on getting me back to walking and talking and not my mental recovery from this life changing stroke.

Once in community rehab, I was fortunate to work with a very supportive occupational therapist and physiotherapist, both of whom felt I would benefit from speaking with a psychologist. However, I was told that I could not access the services of a psychologist at the rehab centre, and would have to source one outside. Again, rehabilitation services were focused on the physical.

Asking for help was a difficult thing to do! With the support of my General Practitioner, he wrote a mental health care plan and helped me find a psychologist. With access to sessions limited, I was not able to get the help needed. The care plan sessions concluded and I was still struggling, feeling lost and in a dark place. With no income I could not continue to access the services I needed. Fortunately for me, I stumbled upon a free counselling service run by the local council.

Today, I am continuing on my recovery journey. Currently I am looking for a psychologist who can help me look to the future and create new achievable goals. I am living independently in a lifestyle community and am back driving. Unfortunately, I have been unable to regain the use of my right arm in a functional way and have been unable to return to work. However, remaining positive about the future and making plans for a new business.

“During my recovery, my mental health seemed to be of less importance than my physical recovery to the health professionals that were treating me, but for me it was just as important to recover mentally so that I could cope with the physical demands of rehab,”

Early intervention would have been so helpful in my recovery and goal to return to my business. Along with the Stroke Guidelines a mental health assessment should be part of a discharge plan.

All they do is give anti-depressants with no professional follow up.