P1-23: "It was weird not being able to do things": Women's Symptom Experience of Ischemic Stroke. Preliminary Findings

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Abstract:
Introduction: There is evidence in the literature that women delay longer than men seeking medical assistance for stroke symptoms. Because few researchers have examined women’s
perceptions of stroke symptoms, a qualitative study using narrative methodology was conducted to answer the research question: “How do women with ischemic stroke experience their bodies from the time of symptom onset until they arrive at the emergency department?

**Method(s):** A purposeful sample of 10 women age 24-86 years who had an ischemic stroke within one year was recruited through stroke support groups, media advisement and rehabilitation facilities. Two in-depth unstructured interviews were conducted with participants, who were asked to tell the story of their stroke from the moment they noticed symptoms until hospital arrival. A phenomenological understanding of the body was the conceptual orientation for the study. Data was analyzed using within and across case techniques. An analytic journal was kept.

**Results:** Participants found it easier to recount the sequence of events that occurred between symptom onset and hospital arrival than to describe their bodily experiences during this time. Bodily experiences were characterized as “strange” and “weird.” Participants used analogies and drew upon past experiences when asked to describe their symptoms. Stroke symptoms were experienced as difficulties carrying out intentions. Activities such as getting up from a couch, which previously were performed unthinkingly, now required conscious thought. Participants described paying unaccustomed attention to the functioning of their bodies and mentally telling their bodies what to do. Aspects of the environment, such as stairs, were perceived as obstacles to be overcome. Several participants felt as though their bodies were functioning normally even though evidence, often from their sense of vision, indicated otherwise.

**Discussion & Conclusions:** The women in this study experienced ischemic stroke as a disruption in their ability to act intentionally and as an alteration in their relationship with their bodies. Understanding women’s symptom experience may assist with development of interventions to promote earlier treatment of women with stroke.

**Abstract History:**
This abstract has not been presented or accepted for presentation in whole or in part at the SNRS or other scientific meeting.

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