We substantially agree with Caplan when he says that “among all potential specialists, it is neurologists with an interest, training, and experience in caring for stroke patients that are most likely to possess all the attributes required.”

In our opinion, however, it is Donnan who gets to the root of the matter: stroke is currently by far the largest public health problem. Therefore, “who cares for the 20 million strokes that occur each year globally? The reality is that only a small proportion are,” and we would add ‘can be,’ “managed by neurologists. It does seem unlikely that sufficient neurologists will be trained in time to meet the demands of the impending stroke epidemic and its ever-expanding therapeutic implications.”

In this regard, Italian neurologists have recently designed a dedicated master’s degree in stroke. The course, which is open to any physician who is interested in gaining specialized, professional experience in stroke management, lasts 2 years. During this period, trainees are expected to attend 1500 hours of learning activities, consisting of both theoretical lessons (265 hours) and clinical training (935 hours). The remaining 300 hours are dedicated to other activities, such as the preparation for and attendance at conferences, the writing of scientific papers, an end-of-course thesis, seminars, and interactive teaching.

The aim of this master’s degree is to impart the scientific and clinical knowledge and experience required to tackle all aspects of stroke: its causes and consequences, the management of adult patients, and the incorporation of evidence-based medicine principles into daily practice. The learning objectives have been divided into 8 areas:

1. diagnosis, treatment, and general management of acute stroke–18 credits;
2. neurovascular imaging–4 credits;
3. cardiac and carotid ultrasound diagnostics–3 credits;
4. organization, management, and health planning of dedicated services–2 credits;
5. experimental models of cerebral ischemia–1 credit;
6. evidence-based medicine and clinimetrics in stroke–1 credit;
7. stroke rehabilitation–12 credits;
8. prevention and territorial management of cerebrovascular diseases–7 credits.

In order to achieve the overall aims of this degree, the course ensures that participants follow multidisciplinary training in each of the aforementioned fields of interest.

A written record of training will certify that participants have achieved the aims set out in each of the aforementioned 8 areas.

This second level master’s degree in cerebrovascular diseases was first offered in 2003 as an experimental interuniversity course at the Department of Neurological Sciences, University of Rome “La Sapienza,” and will be soon active also in other Italian universities.

Its curriculum and design will be the object of a separate publication.

The learning objectives in each specific area of this degree, together with other details, are available at the following website: http://w3.uniroma1.it/masterictus/.

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Maria Luisa Sacchetti

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