Hospital-Based Stroke Diagnoses Among the Oldest Old in the United States
1997 to 2006

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Background and Purpose—Continued surveillance of stroke trends among the very elderly is needed to determine how best to mitigate the likely rise with time in the proportion of strokes in this relatively understudied age group. This study assessed recent time trends in the proportion of hospitalized patients with stroke who are very elderly.

Methods—Data were obtained from all US states that contributed to the Nationwide Inpatient Sample. Patients with stroke diagnoses were identified by the International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision procedure codes. Percentage of stroke diagnoses among persons aged ≥80 years was evaluated.

Results—Between 1997 and 2006, the absolute number of US hospital-based stroke diagnoses lessened (from 680 666 to 609 381). Of all patients with stroke, very elderly men constituted 25.2% in 1997 versus 25.1% in 2006 (P=0.83), whereas very elderly women were 39.5% in 1997 versus 39.9% in 2006 (P=0.55). Very elderly persons comprised similar percentages of primary acute ischemic stroke in 1997 versus 2006, but their proportion of primary acute intracerebral hemorrhages rose from 29.4% in 1997 to 32.2% in 2006 (P=0.005) and of primary acute subarachnoid hemorrhages from 12.5% in 1997 to 14.5% in 2006 (P=0.039).

Conclusion—Across the last decade, the overall percentage of persons in the United States hospitalized with stroke, who were very elderly, remained unchanged, but the proportion of persons with primary acute hemorrhagic strokes who were very elderly increased. (Stroke. 2010;41:1820-1822.)

Key Words: acute cerebral ischemia ■ acute stroke ■ elderly ■ epidemiology trends ■ hospitalization ■ incidence ■ oldest old ■ outcomes ■ sex-specific stroke diagnosis ■ United States population
was 4,141,216 × 0.82 = 3,395,797. Total number of stroke hospitalizations was obtained by summing across codes.

Weighted percentages of stroke hospitalizations among men and women in the sample were computed. Race was not adjusted for given the large amount of missing data on this variable ranging from 21% to 28% for years 1998 to 2006 and 9% for year 1997. We tested for significant trends in hospitalization percentage over years using linear logistic regression at the same time as adjusting for necessary survey design variables. To test for curvilinear trends, we included year as a continuous variable together with the quadratic term to the regression models. Probability values for assessing sex differences in hospitalizations across the study period were computed using contrasts (Z-tests) under the regression model. All data analyses were conducted using SAS (Version 9.1; SAS Institute Inc, Cary, NC). Statistical hypotheses were tested using $P < 0.05$ as the level of statistical significance.

Results

Across the 10-year study period, the proportion of persons aged ≥80 years in the US population rose very modestly (Supplementary Figure I; available at stroke.ahajournals.org). Supplementary Table I confirmed a subtle shift in the age distribution among the oldest old toward older ages.

Over the study period, actual number of total hospital-based stroke diagnoses decreased from 680,666 to 609,381 (10.5%). Table I displays descriptive summary statistics (for simplicity, only results for years 1997 and 2006 are shown). These results are generally comparable across variables, but there was a 5 percentage point drop in those persons categorized as being of white race, a substantial increase in the proportion of teaching hospitals, and a 6-point percentage reduction in admission sources other than the emergency room.

Table II shows stroke rates in the oldest old age groups: rates increased in persons aged 85 to 89 years relative to persons aged 80 to 84 years and declined at some point beyond age 90 to 94 years in both men and women.

Table 2 shows percent of stroke diagnoses in men and women aged ≥80 years by study year. Percentage of stroke diagnoses among very elderly men was 25.2% in 1997 versus 25.1% in 2006 ($P = 0.827$), whereas stroke diagnoses among very elderly women was 39.5% in 1997 versus 39.9% in 2006 ($P = 0.553$). There was no difference in the rate of change in stroke diagnoses between the sexes (probability value for comparing change [slope] = 0.55). Primary stroke (Table 3) diagnoses showed similar patterns as the result for the overall hospital-based stroke diagnoses, but primary acute stroke by type indicated that although ischemic stroke rates remained flat, hemorrhagic stroke rates increased (Supplemental Table III). The very elderly percentage of primary acute intracerebral hemorrhages rose from 29.4% in 1997 to 32.2% in 2006 ($P = 0.005$), whereas their proportion of primary acute subarachnoid hemorrhage rose from 12.5% in 1997 to 14.5% in 2006 ($P = 0.039$).
Discussion

This study found that over the last decade, the percentage of strokes in the oldest old in society remained roughly the same. The reasons for the lack of any corresponding rise in the proportion of strokes along with the increasingly older population are not immediately clear. However, there are some conceivable explanations. First, it could well be that the evolving trend toward an older society may have been possibly outweighed by a greater relative impact of preventive care among the very elderly thereby lowering the number of these individuals admitted to the hospital with stroke. This explanation, although tempting, is generally not borne out by the underdiagnosis and undertreatment generally seen among the very elderly with or at risk for stroke. Second, educational campaigns in the recent decade to raise awareness about stroke warning signs and availability of stroke treatment may have prompted relatively younger individuals to be taken to hospitals more frequently than the very elderly, the latter of whom frequently receive less aggressive care. Third, it is possible that over the study period there may have been a boost in nonhospital strokes among the very elderly that were not captured by this study. The substantial increase in the proportion of strokes diagnosed at teaching hospitals, and percentage reduction in admission sources other than the emergency room, may lend some support to the latter speculative points.

Of note, an analysis of acute stroke by type revealed that although rates of acute ischemic stroke diagnosis among the oldest old also remained flat, rates of intracerebral hemorrhage and subarachnoid hemorrhage showed a pattern of modest increase. This slight rise in acute hemorrhagic stroke rates coincided with the observed modest aging among the very elderly and is certainly a trend to watch in the years to come.

The study was limited by possible inaccurate reporting of International Classification of Diseases codes and lack of information on the rate of nonhospital strokes. However, it was strengthened by its nationwide scope, incidence data, hospital-diagnosed strokes, and inclusion of analysis of both primary and secondary stroke diagnoses (which minimized the false-negative rate) and primary stroke diagnoses only.

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Disclosures

None.

References

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