

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

18th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday
6 December 2023

PE2048: Review the FAST stroke awareness campaign

Petitioner	James Anthony Bundy
Petition summary	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to increase awareness of the symptoms of stroke by reviewing its promotion of the FAST stroke campaign, and ensuring that awareness campaigns include all the symptoms of a potential stroke.
Webpage	https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2048

Introduction

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 19 September 2023.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. Every petition can collect signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 1,059 signatures have been received on this petition.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. A response has been received from the Scottish Government and is included at **Annexe C** of this paper.
6. A submission has been provided by the petitioner. This is included at **Annexe D**.
7. The Committee has also received a submission from Sandesh Gulhane MSP, which is included at **Annexe E**.

Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE2048: Review the FAST stroke awareness campaign

Petitioner

James Anthony Bundy

Date lodged

19 September 2023

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to increase awareness of the symptoms of stroke by reviewing its promotion of the FAST stroke campaign, and ensuring that awareness campaigns include all the symptoms of a potential stroke.

Previous action

I have contacted Keith Brown MSP and requested a meeting be set up to discuss the petition.

Background information

Anthony (Tony) Bundy tragically lost his life on 29th June 2023 after suffering a Basilar Artery Ischaemic Stroke. When Tony started suffering a stroke, his face and arms were unaffected, and his speech was not slurred. This meant that Tony passed the "FAST" stroke test, and was denied the emergency treatment required to save his life until it was too late.

Tony's family are now raising awareness of all the symptoms of stroke, including the inability to stand, cold sweats, eyes struggling to focus, slowed speech, nausea, and vomiting.

We are calling for a review of the FAST stroke campaign, looking at international examples, in order to ensure stroke awareness campaigns include the wider range of symptoms of stroke. This is intended to maximise knowledge amongst the general public and medical profession.

Increasing awareness will hopefully mean fewer families will have to experience the pain and loss that Tony's family has endured.

Annexe B

The logo for SPICe (The Information Centre) is a purple rounded rectangle. The text 'SPICe' is in white, with 'The Information Centre' and 'An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh' in white text below it.

The Information Centre
An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE2048](#): ‘Review the FAST stroke awareness campaign’, lodged by James Anthony Bundy

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

[PE2048](#) calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to increase awareness of the symptoms of stroke by reviewing its promotion of the FAST stroke campaign and ensuring that awareness campaigns include all the symptoms of a potential stroke.

The petition was lodged in response to Anthony (Tony) Bundy’s death in June 2023 after suffering a basilar artery ischaemic stroke. The petitioner stated that when his father, Tony, experienced a stroke, his face and arms were unaffected, and his speech was not slurred. This meant that Tony passed the FAST stroke test and did not receive emergency treatment in time to save his life.

Prevalence of strokes in Scotland

There were 11,257 [reported strokes in Scotland](#) in 2022, an increase from 11,055 in 2021. Public Health Scotland’s latest data showed that in the year ending 31 March 2022, [3,836 deaths were reported](#) in which cerebrovascular disease, including stroke, was the underlying cause. The statistics published on deaths due to stroke in Scotland do not currently include details of the type of stroke experienced.

Stroke symptoms and the FAST test

A stroke is a [life-threatening medical emergency](#), which occurs when the blood supply to part of the brain is cut off. Urgent treatment is essential to minimise damage to the brain and potentially save the individual's life.

The [FAST test](#) is used to assess a patient for the most common symptoms of a stroke:

- **Facial weakness:** Can the person smile? Has their mouth or eye drooped?
- **Arm weakness:** Can the person raise both arms?
- **Speech problems:** Can the person speak clearly and understand what you say?
- **Time to call 999:** if you see any of these signs.

Although the FAST test can identify most strokes, patients can also present with [other less common symptoms](#), as the petitioner notes. These symptoms include:

- nausea and vomiting
- complete paralysis of one side of the body
- sudden loss or blurring of vision
- dizziness
- confusion
- difficulty understanding what others are saying
- difficulty swallowing
- problems with balance and co-ordination
- a sudden, very severe headache causing a blinding pain unlike anything experienced before
- loss of consciousness.

A [2021 systematic review of evidence](#) found that the FAST test accurately detected 69-90% of strokes. However, the review noted that the FAST test missed up to 40% of [posterior circulation strokes](#), such as the [basilar artery ischaemic stroke](#) experienced by Tony Bundy. Posterior strokes affect the blood flow at the back of the brain, and [account for 20-25%](#) of all acute strokes. They can [cause different symptoms](#) than those assessed by the FAST test, including vertigo,

vision problems, and nausea and vomiting. The [systematic review](#) noted that the less commonly used BE-FAST (Balance, Eyes, Face, Arms, Speech, Time) test identified more ischaemic strokes than the FAST test, and stated that it may play an important role in the diagnosis of strokes.

The National Advisory Committee for Stroke (NACS) 2022 report, "[A Progressive Stroke Pathway](#)", emphasised the importance of targeted education for health professionals to recognise the signs and symptoms of stroke, including in certain circumstances where presentation may be atypical, such as a negative FAST test.

[FAST campaigns](#) aim to raise public awareness of the main symptoms of a stroke and emphasise the need for urgent medical treatment. Stroke awareness campaigns commonly focus on the FAST acronym; however, [NHS England's 2023 stroke awareness campaign advice](#) also made reference to less common symptoms of a stroke. [NHS Inform's webpage about strokes](#) also includes details of less common symptoms.

Scottish Government actions

The [Scottish Government's Stroke Improvement Plan 2023](#) listed awareness raising among its key priorities in the delivery of stroke care. The Plan committed to working to understand public awareness of stroke symptoms and supporting the delivery of FAST awareness campaigns.

In response to written question [S6W-20425](#) on 29 August 2023, the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health, Jenni Minto MSP, stated that the Scottish Government will "work with third sector organisations and health marketing colleagues to consider the most effective way of raising public awareness, including the less common symptoms of stroke."

Sarah Swift
Researcher

12 October 2023

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Annexe C

Scottish Government submission of 17 October 2023

PE2048/A: Review the FAST stroke awareness campaign

Thank you for your request for a response to petition PE2048, calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to increase awareness of the symptoms of stroke by reviewing its promotion of the FAST (Face, Arm, Speech, Time) stroke campaign, and ensuring that awareness campaigns include all the symptoms of a potential stroke.

The Scottish Government is sorry to hear of the loss of Mr Bundy and extends its sincere sympathies to his family.

We published our refreshed Stroke Improvement Plan in June 2023, which sets out our vision for minimising preventable strokes and ensuring timely and equitable access to life-saving treatment.

The Plan recognises that timely access to care following a stroke is vital and that the rapid identification of symptoms of stroke is of crucial importance. That is why, in Priority two of the Stroke Improvement Plan, the Scottish Government has committed to establishing the current degree of public understanding of the symptoms of stroke, and whether certain at-risk groups require different messaging.

We will work with third sector organisations and wider stakeholders to consider the most effective way of raising public awareness of stroke symptoms, including the delivery of FAST campaigns. In addition to FAST campaigns, we will also consider how awareness of the less common symptoms of stroke can be increased.

The Scottish Government has also committed to supporting the Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) in exploring the feasibility of using video call technology to diagnose hyperacute strokes more accurately. In addition, the SAS is also progressing the development of a quality improvement

initiative for operational ambulance crews to receive clinical feedback regarding diagnostic accuracy and the application of FAST.

I hope this reply is helpful to the Committee.

Yours faithfully

Jenni Minto, MSP
Minister for Public Health and Women's Health

Annexe D

Petitioner submission of 17 November 2023

PE2048/B: Review the FAST stroke awareness campaign

Dear Members of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee,

I write to you with a heavy heart, propelled by the urgency of a matter that has profoundly impacted my family and countless others across our nation. My purpose is to bring to your attention critical information that underscores the dire need for an immediate review and expansion of the current FAST stroke campaign.

Tragically, my family suffered the devastating loss of my 53-year-old father to a stroke that went undiagnosed until it was irreversibly late. His symptoms, regrettably, did not align with the parameters of the existing FAST campaign. A few weeks before his fatal stroke, he exhibited distressing signs—a loss of balance, persistent vomiting, and cold sweats—yet these fell beyond the scope of recognition under the current acronym.

During a visit to his GP, my father, concerned about a possible mini-stroke, sought guidance. However, the symptoms were dismissed as potential consequences of declining eyesight or excessive screen exposure. This dismissal, I am convinced, was due to the limitations imposed by the prevailing FAST campaign. Had there been an inclusive approach, such as a BE FAST (Balance, Eyes, Face, Arms, Speech, Throwing-up and Time) model, these symptoms might have triggered the necessary urgency for a comprehensive evaluation, potentially saving his life.

The alarming statistics, as outlined in the SPICe briefing, corroborate the inadequacy of the FAST test, particularly in detecting posterior strokes. Astonishingly, up to 40% of posterior circulation strokes are missed by the FAST test, encompassing 8-10% of all strokes. In a country where 11,257 strokes were reported in 2022, this translates to a staggering 900 to 1,125 strokes annually in Scotland alone that are overlooked due to the limitations of the current campaign.

This is an unacceptable reality in our modern society. The ramifications of this oversight extend far beyond statistics; they permeate the lives of families, leaving behind immeasurable grief and irreparable loss. Each stroke missed is a life irrevocably altered or lost, and it is our collective responsibility to rectify this systemic flaw.

I implore the Committee to consider the gravity of these revelations and urge for an immediate and comprehensive review of the existing stroke awareness campaign.

Incorporating a more inclusive and encompassing acronym, such as BE FAST, can bridge the gap in identifying diverse stroke symptoms and ensure equitable access to life-saving interventions for all individuals.

We cannot allow a system that disproportionately favours the recognition of certain symptoms to persist. The time to act is now, to prevent further unnecessary loss and to ensure that every individual experiencing a stroke receives the timely care they deserve.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. I sincerely hope that my family's painful experience can serve as a catalyst for substantive change in our approach to stroke awareness and prevention.

Annexe E

Sandesh Gulhane MSP submission of 20 November 2023

PE2048/C: Review the FAST stroke awareness campaign

I write in support of petition PE2048, regarding FAST stroke awareness.

Stroke is a medical emergency which is still one of the leading causes of death in Scotland. We need to raise awareness of stroke and ensure that as many people as possible can identify the early signs of the condition. By acting as quickly as possible, lives can be saved, and we can prevent severe disability.

I support the aims of this petition, namely to review the FAST stroke campaign and to ensure that the full range of potential symptoms is widely known by the broadest range of people, including among medical professionals.

I would certainly support additional action from the Scottish Government, building on their Stroke Improvement Plan 2023, to ensure that any necessary action is taken to increase awareness in this area.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.