

Stroke victims 'on their own once they go home'

STROKE survivors 'are being abandoned' once they leave hospital, with little or no aftercare to help them recover their independence, the Irish Heart Foundation has said.

An audit of stroke services in Ireland has found that although major advances have been made in hospital care for stroke victims - resulting in improved survival rates - aftercare for stroke victims is severely deficient.

Currently, just one hospital has a specialist community stroke rehabilitation team, leaving the majority of patients without care to help them recover once they are discharged.

Chris Macey, advocacy officer for the Irish Heart Foundation, said that since the last national audit in 2008, stroke services

By **Kevin Keane**

have become very good at treatment at the emergency phase, but 'start to fall off very quickly'.

'In the emergency phase, the thrombolysis (clot-busting) rate has gone from 1% to 11%, which is one of the highest in the world,' he said. 'But there's still major deficits and we're not meeting requirements in any area of the rehabilitation phase.'

'When people go home, the community services are just as bad as they were in 2008; the audit shows that there's only one community stroke team in the whole country and only three hospitals that have a hospital community liaison officer, so basically once you leave the hospital gates, you're on your

own, you're abandoned.'

The National Stroke Audit 2015, carried out on behalf of the HSE and the Irish Heart Foundation, found that just 8% of patients who were sent home from acute hospitals had the benefit of community discharge teams.

Retired printer Gerry Carmody suffered a stroke in 2013 and spent two weeks in Dublin's Mater Hospital. Because of where he was treated, the Dubliner was able to avail of eight weeks of early discharge care in his home from an occupational therapist and a physical therapist, something he said 'brought him on tremendously'.

'I know I am extremely lucky, everybody should be able to avail of these services,' said Mr Carmody.

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

We can't stay young... but inner beauty never fades

TAKING stock is something most of us never do. Bedeviled by distraction, we run here and there without ever taking time to ponder where we are going or who we are. Then, one day, we wake up to find that life has passed us by and we are none the wiser.

Yesterday, I celebrated my birthday. Getting older is not something that bothers me, for there is no point in fighting the inevitable. Indeed, having survived another year should always be a cause of jubilation.

I did not wake up feeling a year older, but only a day older than the one before. Indeed, were it not for the physical symptoms of age, I would have no concept of what it means to get older. That, I think, is how we all feel on our birthdays: we look in the mirror and gasp because the person inside feels much younger than their physical reflection.

As the flesh grows weak, the spirit refuses to age. That feeling is heightened at a time when we are living longer and when few of us are comfortable surrendering to old age. They say that 50 is the new 30 and that middle age is no more.

It is true that people are more body and health-conscious, and that the definition of youth is under review. When I was a child, people of my age were thought to be on the last lap of life. Now, those in their 40s are still considered relatively youthful.

We all know, however, that each birthday brings new challenges. No matter how fit and healthy we feel, age insists on imposing physical limitations. Parents of my vintage understand that more than most.

Taking stock does not mean conceding to age, but rather looking at where you are and thinking about where you are going. It entails glancing back across the years and asking what ideals remain unfulfilled. It means linking past and future from your present perspective.

The cult of perpetual youth can sometimes delude us into thinking that time is unlimited. We delay decisions, abandon commitments and postpone what we know must one day be confronted. Sooner or later, however, reality catches up and with it comes a mountain of regrets.

Some say the best way of taking stock is to ask if you are happier now than on your last birthday. But does happiness consist in having no personal problems, no health issues and no financial worries? The parable of the 'rich fool' cautions against conflating happiness with the absence of problems.

A farmer had insufficient room to store his crops, so he decided to pull down all his barns and build bigger ones. Now, he said, 'you have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy: eat, drink and be merry'. That very night, the farmer died.

Birthdays remind us that time is not an endless commodity, that a life without problems does not exist, but that so long as we can breathe we can be redeemed. We can wake up today and do those things we have put on the long finger. We can make those decisions, those calls and renew those vital commitments.

The truth is we shall not be remembered for how we looked in life or for how valiantly we fought the onslaught of age. We shall be remembered only for what we did and said in the course of our human journey. The real question is not: 'Am I happier?' or 'Do I look older?', but: 'Am I a kinder person than this time last year?'

You won't get the answer to that question from looking in the mirror. With each birthday, I notice yet more physical blemishes, more cracks and creases. With each candle that is added to the cake, I find I am less able to eat and have it too.

The answer can be found only through other people. Are they happier in my presence and do they smile more when I am around? Do they come to me for help or do they run a mile in order to avoid me?

THAT is what it means to take stock. It means using kindness, compassion and forgiveness as the criteria for judging the achievements of each year. It means looking through the mirror to what lies on the other side.

Ultimately, glamour and fitness are no defence against age. The most beautiful people are no less mortal than the rest of us. However, there is a form of beauty that does not age, that exists even beyond death.

It is the beauty of a helping hand, a kind word and a tender heart. It is the beauty that shines in those who care for children and the elderly, who run to the defence of strangers and who are ready to forgive the unforgivable. It is the beauty that is slow to anger and quick to love.

It is not the type of beauty the world celebrates, yet it is something we all need to experience at some point in our lives. No matter how old or young, no matter how strong or frail, we all require kindness. We need to know that we are loved and respected.

Yesterday, I looked in the mirror and saw an older man. It was only when I gazed into my loved ones' eyes that I saw who I really was.

—mark.dooley@daily@mail.ie—

The Gaiety Theatre presents the Druid Production of

Druid



★★★★★
IRISH MAIL ON SUNDAY

★★★★★
HERALD

★★★★★
SUNDAY BUSINESS POST

'MASTERPIECE'
IRISH INDEPENDENT

'TREMENDOUS'
THE IRISH TIMES

'MAGNIFICENT'
RTE THE VIEW

BIG MAGGIE

BY JOHN B. KEANE DIRECTED BY GARRY HYNES
STARRING AISLING O'SULLIVAN



JOHN OLOHAN



CLARE BARRETT



KEITH DUFFY

LIMITED ENGAGEMENT
FROM 29TH JANUARY 2016

GAIETY
THEATRE

TICKETS FROM €21 (INCLUDING BOOKING FEE & €1 RESTORATION LEVY)

TICKETMASTER | 0818 719 300 | WWW.TICKETMASTER.IE

PHONE & INTERNET BOOKINGS SUBJECT TO 12.5% SERVICE CHARGE PER TICKET (MAX €6.10), AGENTS €2.15 PER TICKET

