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A RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIAL OF NATURE-BASED POST-STROKE FATIGUE REHABILITATION (“THE NATURE STROKE STUDY” (NASTRU)): STUDY DESIGN AND PROGRESS REPORT

Anna María Pálsdóttir¹, Gerd Andersson², Patrik Grahn¹, Bo Norrving^{2,3}, Sara Kyrö-Wissler¹, Ingemar F Petersson^{3,4}, Hélène Pessah-Rasmussen^{2,5}.

¹Department of Work Science, Business Economics and Environmental Psychology, the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Alnarp, Sweden; ²VO Neurology and rehabilitation medicine, Skånes University Hospital; ³Orthopaedics, Department of clinical sciences Lund, Lund University; ⁴Epidemiology and Register Centre South, Skåne; ⁵ Department of Health Sciences, Lund University.

ABSTRACT

Fatigue is common after stroke and contributes to disability, impaired quality of life, and reduced work ability. Currently, there is no evidence-based intervention for post-stroke fatigue but idiopathic chronic fatigue and burnt-out syndromes may benefit from nature-based rehabilitation. The aim of NASTRU was to examine whether ten weeks of nature-based rehabilitation, as add-on to standard management, could influence post-stroke fatigue (primary outcome), depression, work ability or functional outcome (secondary outcomes), compared to controls.

Inclusion criteria were patients with stroke living in the catchment area of the Skåne University Hospital, 50-80 years old, independent in ADL, and reporting fatigue at 3 months (sub-acute subgroup) or > one year (chronic sub-group) after the index stroke. Patients randomized to the intervention underwent a rehabilitation program in groups up to 8 patients in an especially designed garden at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Alnarp. The intervention was grounded in environmental psychology and occupational therapy, supported by a multimodal rehabilitation team that utilized the garden/nature for sensory stimulation, body awareness, meaningful occupations and nature experiences.

The enrollment of 101 patients (51 intervention; 50 control) was completed on August 2014. Follow-up is on-going, with assessments by examiner blinded to treatment group, at end of intervention period, 8 months, and 14 months after randomization. A parallel study with qualitative in-depth interviews in a subset of patients, who were randomized to the intervention group, as well as the staff, is also on going.