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The meaning of occupational gaps in everyday life after stroke

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Introduction: Limitations in the performance of everyday occupations after stroke are common even years after injury. Little is known about how persons with stroke experience their occupational gaps, i.e. the gap that occurs between what the individual wants and needs to do and what he or she actually does, over time.

Objectives: To identify how occupational gaps were characterized in the lived experiences of performing everyday occupations during the first year after stroke.

Methods: Four persons who had had a stroke were interviewed at 1, 3, 6, and 12 months after onset. The interviews were open ended, transcribed and analysed using the Empirical, Phenomenological, Psychological method, which aims to describe the essence, structure and character of the studied phenomenon.

Results: The analysis identified 4 main characteristics: (a) Encountering occupational gaps in formerly taken-for-granted activities (b) Striving to narrow gaps in desired occupations, (c) Recognising oneself in doing (d) Searching for a new sense of self through doing, (e) Creating strategies to enable doing.

Conclusion: The findings reveal the importance of being able to preserve some sense of self in everyday doings after a life-course disruption due to stroke. Important implications for clinical practice are to be sensitive to clients' experiences in this process, to enable experiences in occupations promoting recognition, and to support the clients in recapturing desired occupations.

Contribution to practice: Knowledge on the clients' experiences of being restricted in parts of their previous everyday doings has been gained. The results indicate the importance of acknowledging each individual's perceptions of how they see themselves as doers and what occupations he or she finds is most important to recapture.