Scales in stroke patients: the National Institutes of Health Stroke Scale (NIHSS)

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Abstract

The National Institutes of Health Stroke Scale (NIHSS) is an assessment tool used worldwide to quantify neurological deficit in people with stroke. It is simple and easily administered in all clinical settings, including the emergency department, wards and out-patient clinics. This scale is composed of 15 items based on different parts of the neurological examination such as the level of consciousness, language, neglect, visual-field loss, extra-ocular movement, motor strength, ataxia, dysarthria, and sensory loss. The observer rates the patient’s ability to answer questions and perform activities so that each item is scored from 0 (normal) to a maximum of 2 to 4, according to the item tested. It takes less than 5 minutes to complete by trained people, and its reliability among health care providers is high. It is useful not only in evaluating the severity of stroke and in assessing the evolution of deficit over time, but also helps in the decision of treatment and in predicting patient outcome. This workshop aims at providing training skills in applying the NIHSS to patients with different neurological deficits due to stroke.