

## Case study

# Stroke Association: User research steers digital product development

**Stroke**  
association





**The Stroke Association is the UK's leading charity dedicated to conquering stroke. It provides vital support services, campaigns for better stroke care and funds research to find better treatments.**

In addition to the medical research the charity undertakes, it also provides a range of information resources and support services, to help people rebuild their lives after stroke. The charity turned to us for UX research to inform the development and extension of My Stroke Guide, its digital self management tool.

*“The user research has given us a really rich understanding of the stroke survivor audience.”*

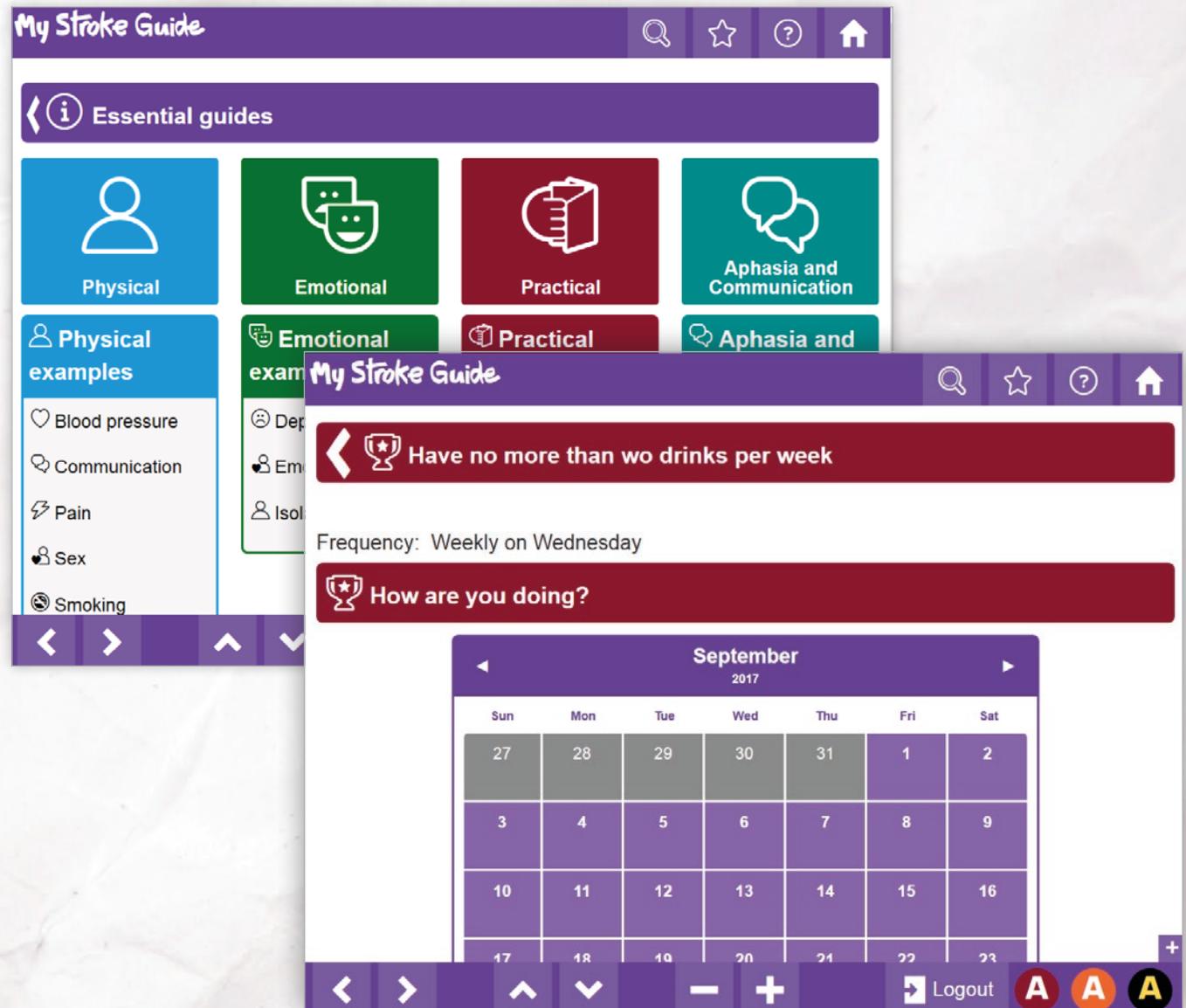
Laura Richards, Head of Insight and Business Analysis,  
Stroke Association

# The challenge

Stroke Association was aiming to make My Stroke Guide, which had previously only been available to people in selected NHS areas, freely accessible to stroke survivors across the whole country. In preparation for this, it had conducted initial qualitative research that focused on how best to communicate My Stroke Guide to a wider audience. This research revealed the need to understand user needs in greater depth to optimise the site for them.

Before extending availability of the tool, Stroke Association wanted to gain deeper insight into what users – stroke survivors and their ‘inner circle’ of family and friends – wanted from My Stroke Guide, and how it could be improved to ensure maximum engagement and usefulness.

As the charity’s Head of Insight and Business Analysis, Laura Richards’ role is to support better decision-making. She used the initial My Stroke Guide research as the basis of the user experience research brief, and ran a competitive pitch process that was won by System Concepts. Laura cites our, “sector experience and awareness of the sensitivities of working with people with disabilities,” as central to our appointment.





## What we did

Our goal was to help optimise the future direction of the My Stroke Guide tool, in terms of both the content and features offered. We started our user research with a one week diary study: participants were recruited from across the UK, including stroke survivors and some friends and family. About half of these participants were existing My Stroke Guide users, while half were not. “We definitely got a lot of value from this part of the exercise,” Laura Richards says.

To build on the diary study, we conducted individual and contextual paired interviews with survivors and their supporters. The information gathered enabled us to build up a picture of stroke survivors’ needs, and to better understand how people go about life, post-stroke.

In terms of how the research exercise was run, Laura comments, “System Concepts were particularly strong on communication and project management – they were very on top of things throughout the project.”

Our in-depth user needs report provided a detailed analysis of the research. “Everyone was hugely complimentary about the report, and I had lots of positive feedback,” says Laura. We then took the key findings and summarised them in a presentation, which we used to facilitate a half day user needs workshop, attended by selected Stroke Association representatives. “Offering to do a workshop at the end, rather than a standard presentation, was a nice approach,” concludes Laura.

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Laura Richards, Head of Insight and Business Analysis, Stroke Association



# Benefits

**In addition to providing insights on user needs, the research also delivered highly specific and in depth understanding relating to each of the main features of the My Stroke Guide website. This equipped the charity to weigh the potential impact of changes, against the ease and feasibility of implementation.**

Laura Richards says, “In addition to immediate actions for the product team, the research has also informed our long term vision, with valuable insights and greater understanding of stroke survivors. This will be incorporated into the longer term strategy of My Stroke Guide.”

## Workshop

Our post research workshop session proved valuable to the Stroke Association, highlighting the need for certain strategic decisions to be

made. Getting sub-teams from the charity in a room together enabled everyone to engage with the research findings much more closely, thinking beyond the day-to-day and creating a more open perspective. This proved a productive environment for agreeing priorities and assigning individual and collective actions and responsibilities.

“It’s easy to receive a report in the normal way,” says Laura, “System Concepts were very proactive in getting people together to do participative work. This generated new ideas, made the findings more actionable and encouraged greater ownership of the issues. It was a real positive.”

Laura says that another benefit of this type of research, is that it is valuable in building the business cases for sponsorship and partnership. It means that Stroke Association can better demonstrate and evidence how it helps people.

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**Laura Richards, Head of Insight and Business Analysis, Stroke Association**

## Advice

Asked for any advice she would offer other organisations considering running user research, Laura Richards stresses the value of getting internal teams involved. She says, “We’re still at the beginning of our insight journey. What I’ve found is that if you can get the people on your internal team to take ownership so that they almost become partners themselves with the research agency, you get a much better result.”

“The success of these types of projects really depends on the engagement you get from your internal teams. System Concepts did a fantastic job,” Laura concludes.



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your business, just get in touch.

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