



Policy Health And Education Coronavirus pandemic

— Exclusive

Stroke victims go missing during COVID-19 lockdowns

John Kehoe Senior writer

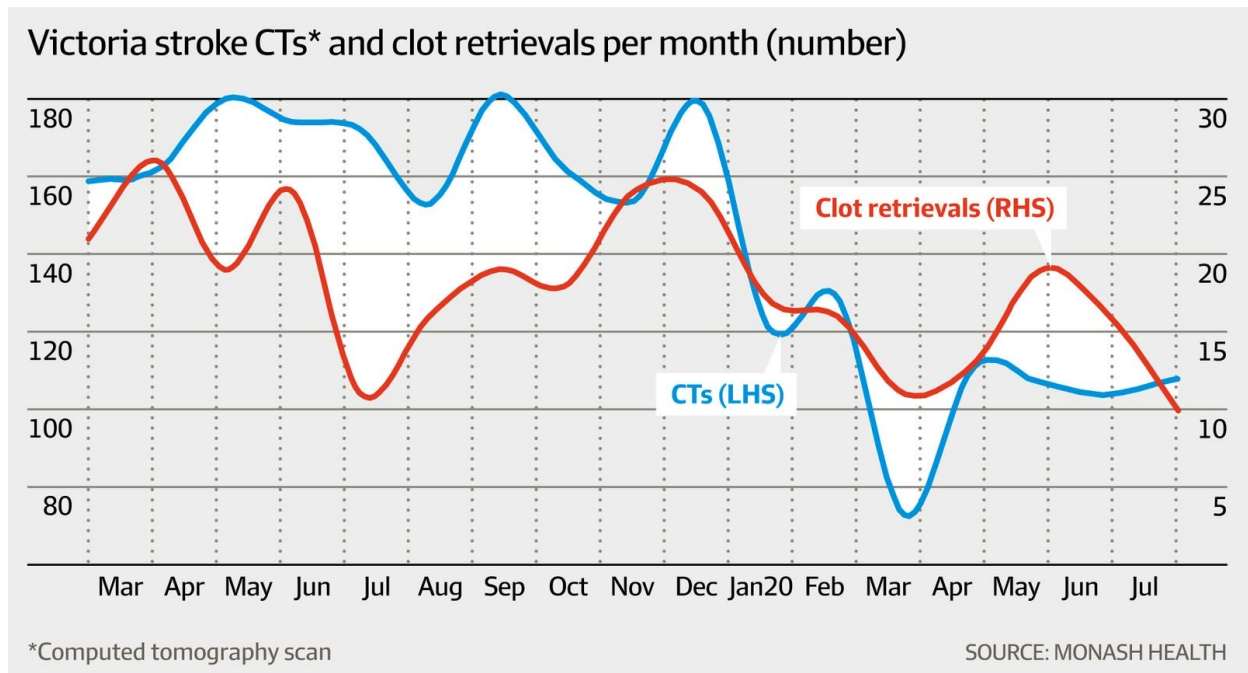


Sep 9, 2020 - 5.11pm



Lockdowns and fear of catching COVID-19 have caused a plunge in the number of stroke patients attending hospitals, particularly in Victoria.

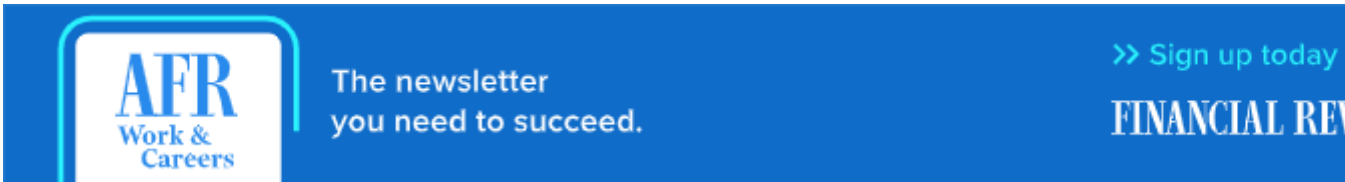
Medical professionals are worried that many more undiagnosed stroke victims will die prematurely or be permanently disabled.



Royal Melbourne Hospital and University of Melbourne director of the brain centre, Professor Stephen Davis, said serious stroke patients were still presenting but there was a significant reduction in admissions for minor strokes and "warning attacks".

"We are very concerned that people are in this lockdown situation and are afraid to go to hospital.

"If you ignore minor symptoms like limb weakness or speech disturbance you are in a high risk category for a major stroke over the next few weeks."



The advertisement features a blue background. On the left, there is a white rounded rectangle containing the text "AFR Work & Careers" in blue. To the right of this, the text "The newsletter you need to succeed." is written in white. Further to the right, the text ">> Sign up today" is in white, and "FINANCIAL REVIEW" is partially visible in white at the bottom right.

Advertisement

Similarly, there has been a significant fall in screenings for cancer and heart disease during COVID-19 shutdowns, in Australia and overseas.

Monash Health neuroradiologist Dr Shalini Amukotuwa said she was really worried stroke patients were becoming "collateral damage" to COVID-19 and would suffer long-term disabilities or have their lives cut short.



RELATED

More cancer deaths from COVID-19 lockdown

Across Monash's three emergency departments which treat about half of Victoria's stroke patients in Melbourne's outer-east, CT scans for strokes totalled 108 in August, up from the April low of 73, but well below the 160 average pre-COVID, Dr Amukotuwa said.

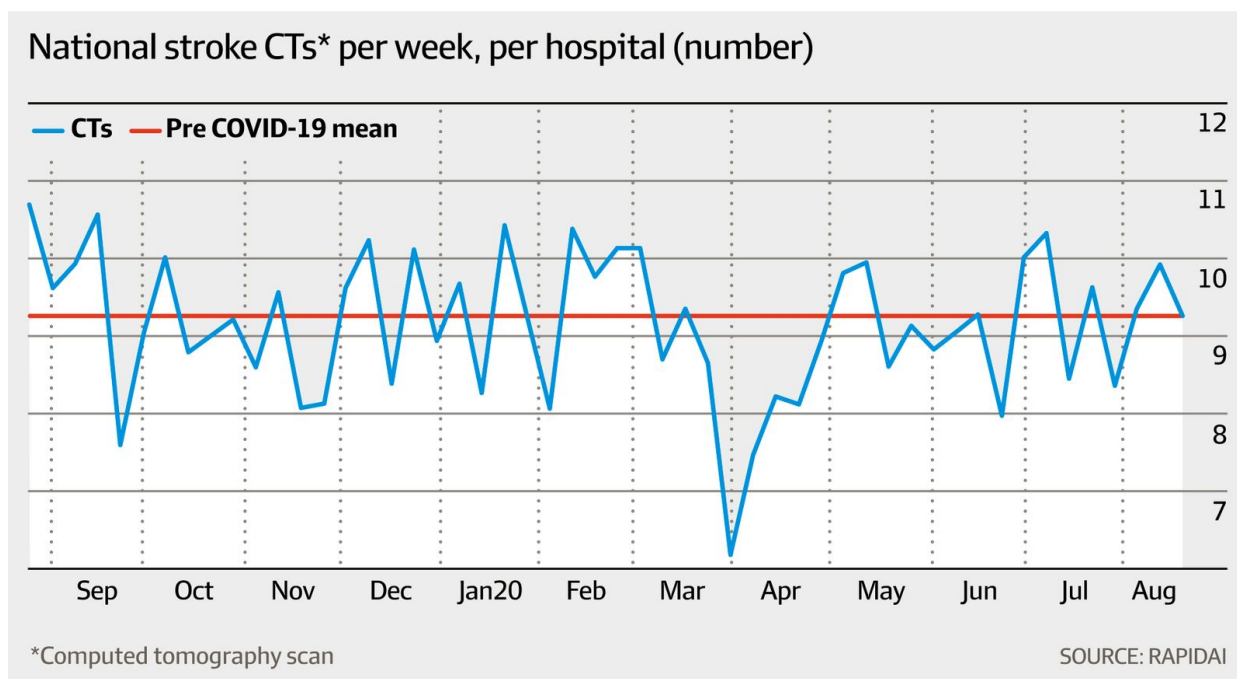
Clot retrieval operations, where a tube is inserted into arteries, had almost halved to 11 in August, from an average of 20 pre-COVID.

People 'afraid' to go to hospital

Professor Vincent Thijs, head of stroke at Melbourne's Austin Hospital, said admissions remained lower than pre-COVID-19, but presentations had recovered somewhat from the very lows of April.

"People are afraid to come to the hospital and there are fewer people around at homes when people are alone during lockdowns to notice less serious strokes," he said.

During the first national shutdown brain scans for strokes fell from a peak of 172 a week to as low as 105 per week between March and May, according to data collated from 45 hospitals by neuroimaging stroke software platform, RapidAI.



Roland Bammer, co-founder of RapidAI and a University of Melbourne professor of radiology, said a joint study he performed revealed that lockdowns had contributed to a severe fall in stroke patients showing up.

"People have been scared to go in and the messaging about the virus frightened people," he said.

"So patients are at home having strokes that are more severe because they didn't come in time to the hospital with their earlier symptoms."

"We need to make people aware they can safely come to hospitals and they shouldn't stay at home, otherwise they will pay the price later."



RELATED

Beware the collateral deaths from COVID-19

After a steep fall between March and May, stroke scans recovered across the country when the economy reopened in June, but doctors said there had been a fall in Victorian hospital presentations over the past month during the second Melbourne lockdown.

Strokes killed 8400 Australians in 2018, 5.3 per cent of all deaths. Stroke also often causes paralysis of parts of the body, speech problems and other symptoms, such as difficulties with swallowing, vision and thinking.

It occurs when a blood vessel supplying blood to the brain either suddenly becomes blocked (ischaemic stroke) or ruptures and begins to bleed (haemorrhagic stroke), according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

There are usually about 38,000 stroke events annually – more than 100 every day.

As of 2018 an estimated 387,000 people – 214,000 males and 173,000 females – had had a stroke at some time in their lives.

Phone 000

Stroke Foundation Clinical Council chair and and Royal Melbourne Hospital head of stroke, Professor Bruce Campbell, urged people with symptoms to phone 000 to limit longer-term health problems. He said changes to FAST (Face, Arms, Speech and Time) were the easiest way to recognise the most common signs of stroke.

Professor Dominique Cadilhac from the Florey Institute of Neuroscience and Mental Health, said: "Every minute you lose delays treatment that can help unclog the clot in the brain, so that leads to more healthy years of life being lost."

The Australian Stroke Clinical Registry's preliminary analysis of 54 hospitals nationally, found people were presenting less often to hospital for suspected episodes of stroke, particularly if they had experienced minor stroke or transient symptoms, during the first national shutdown.

Nationally, about half of the hospitals reported reduced presentations, in particular for mild stroke.



RELATED

Our narrow virus focus is costing lives elsewhere

About one in three reported longer time from stroke onset to patient presentation.

Professor Cadilhac said some hospitals around the country had reallocated resources away from strokes, to deal with COVID-19.

Professor Davis said a very small number of stroke patients also had COVID-19, which increased the stickiness of the blood and occasionally caused strokes.


How the coronavirus is changing markets, business and politics.

Coronavirus: Need to know. Our daily reporting, in your inbox.

SIGN UP NOW

John Kehoe writes on economics, politics and business from the Canberra press gallery. He is a former Washington correspondent. *Connect with John on [Twitter](#). Email John at jkehoe@afr.com*

 Save

 Share

License article

READ MORE

[Coronavirus pandemic](#)

[Australian recession](#)

[Melbourne](#)

LATEST STORIES

[US votes 2020](#)

Trump tells Woodward he deliberately played down COVID dangers

3 mins ago

[Victoria residential property](#)

Victorian Treasurer hints at easing real estate restrictions

13 mins ago

Opinion [Coronavirus pandemic](#)

Dan's debacle shows why democracy matters

18 mins ago

[Aviation](#)

Qantas writes to MPs in bold lobbying push to open borders

35 mins ago

SPONSORED

Executive insights ignite debate

Sponsored

by Microsoft

Forget the look, it's how you sound that makes the difference

Sponsored

by Shure & Jands

LATEST IN HEALTH & EDUCATION

Opinion [Coronavirus pandemic](#)

Aggressive suppression is now Victoria's best option

Victoria is not chasing elimination. The time for that has passed, and the road map announced on Sunday is more nuanced.

Sep 9, 2020 | Antony Blakely

[Coronavirus pandemic](#)

Lockdowns beyond two months do more harm than good

The economic consequences of the virus also disproportionately hurt people working in socially exposed occupations, such as waiters and hairdressers, who are typically more financially vulnerable.

Sep 9, 2020 | John Kehoe

[Coronavirus pandemic](#)

Victoria overhauls contact tracing system

Victoria's contact tracing system is being completely rebuilt, decentralised and supported by a purpose built cloud system to speed up tracing.

Sep 8, 2020 | Tom Burton and Hannah Wootton

[Coronavirus pandemic](#)

Victorian modeller pushed elimination strategy

Tony Blakely, the epidemiologist who co-authored Victoria's lockdown analysis, is a leading advocate for eliminating the virus.

Sep 8, 2020 | Aaron Patrick

[Coronavirus pandemic](#)

Top Sydney boarding school shuts due to infected student

Kincoppal-Rose Bay School has sent boarding students home as a coronavirus cluster there grows, meanwhile the NSW Premier has urged people not to get complacent.

Sep 8, 2020 | Finbar O'Mallon

MOST VIEWED IN POLICY

- 1 Melbourne's CBD faces \$110b wipeout**
 - 2 Andrews must switch to genuine suppression strategy**
 - 3 Foreign policy white paper needs an update, says lead author**
 - 4 Lockdowns beyond two months do more harm than good**
 - 5 Why organised crime is booming during the pandemic**
-

'Wilder and funkier' Longrain awaits Melbourne after lockdown



Jill Dupleix

What's next in fashion? Streetwear king Kim Jones gives sneaker peek

Australian fashion is all dressed up ... with nowhere to go

BOSS

If there's one thing to upskill in, make it this

Natasha Boddy



Hard lessons for boards on who really calls the shots

Did you know you could be a ... head of engineering capability?

Life & Leisure

An owl in the mirror and other hybrids for the future home



20 mins ago | Stephen Todd

Lennox Hastie puts Sydney's food bowl on the Netflix map

Spirits of collaboration

LUXURY

The unlikely beauty company that sells 17 products a minute



Lauren Sams

Australian designers join forces to win Chinese hearts

The Daily Habit of Successful People

MY ACCOUNT ▼

SUBSCRIBE ▼

ABOUT US ▼

CONTACT ▼

MAGAZINES ▼

COLUMNS ▼

MARKETS DATA ▼

LISTS ▼

EVENTS ▼

OUR NETWORK ▼

TERMS AND CONDITIONS ▼

© Copyright 2020 The Australian Financial Review

Site Map