# Hospitalization Linked To Cognitive Decline

Older patients hospitalized for acute care or a critical illness are more likely to experience cognitive decline when compared to older adults who are not hospitalized, according to a study in *JAMA*. Some studies have suggested that many survivors of critical illness experience long-term cognitive impairment, but these studies did not measure cognitive function before a critical illness, according to background information in the article.

William J. Ehlenbach, M.D., M.Sc., of the University of Washington, Seattle, and colleagues analyzed data from a study that was conducting cognitive testing on older adults, and examined administrative data from hospitalizations to determine whether hospitalizations for acute illness or critical illness were associated with cognitive decline and dementia. Cognition was measured with the Cognitive Abilities Screening Instrument (CASI) every 2 years at follow-up visits, and those with scores below a certain point underwent a clinical examination for dementia.

The researchers found that patients who had a hospitalization for an acute care or critical illness had lower CASI scores at follow-up compared to those who were not hospitalized. Also, after adjusting for various factors, patients hospitalized for a non-critical illness had a 40 percent higher risk of dementia. Patients hospitalized for a critical illness also had a higher risk of dementia, but the result was not significant.

“Hospitalization may be a marker for cognitive decline or dementia that has not been diagnosed,” the authors write. “These results also could suggest that factors associated with acute illness, and to a greater degree with critical illness, may be causally related to cognitive decline.”

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