Acquired brain injury (ABI) is defined as any sudden damage to the brain occurring during a person’s lifetime and not as a consequence of birth trauma. Between stroke and traumatic brain injury alone, it is estimated that between 17,000 and 19,000 people in Ireland will suffer an acquired brain injury each year, many of whom will require specialist neurorehabilitation (SNR). A growing demand for SNR in the absence of the development of specialist services has resulted in a considerable waiting list for admission to rehabilitation.

A retrospective database analysis was conducted on 421 patients admitted to inpatients specialist neuro-rehabilitation over a two-year period from January 2015 to December 2016. Patients were categorised into three groups according to the length of time waiting for admission; 0-59 days, 60-119 days and ≥120 days. The groups were assessed for differences between admission and discharge and differences between groups for the following outcomes measures: UK FIM+FAM, Barthel Index (BI), Disability Rating Scale (DRS) and discharge destination.

All patients showed a statistically significant improvement in functional ability between admission and discharge. No significant differences were found between the three groups for FIM+FAM or BI. A statistically significant difference was found between groups for the DRS and for discharge destination.

There are a number of possible reasons for the non-statistical difference in outcomes between groups with different waiting times. These include the type and application of outcome measures, the statistical analysis used and the apparent pattern of admissions which identified ‘a ‘profile’ of patients within each group.

Keywords: specialist rehabilitation; outcomes; waiting lists