

Temporal variations in quality of acute stroke care and outcomes in London hyperacute stroke units: a mixed-methods study

Robert Simister,¹ Georgia B Black,^{2*}
Mariya Melnychuk,² Angus IG Ramsay,²
Abigail Baim-Lance,³ David L Cohen,⁴ Jeannie Eng,⁵
Penny D Xanthopoulou,⁶ Martin M Brown,⁷
Anthony G Rudd,⁸ Steve Morris⁹ and Naomi J Fulop²

¹University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, London, UK

²Department of Applied Health Research, University College London, London, UK

³Center for Innovation in Mental Health, City University of New York, New York, NY, USA

⁴Stroke Service, Haldane and Herrick Wards, Northwick Park Hospital, London, UK

⁵Cancer Division, University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, London, UK

⁶University of Exeter Medical School, Exeter, UK

⁷Queen Square Institute of Neurology, University College London, London, UK

⁸King's College London and Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, London, UK

⁹Department of Public Health and Primary Care, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

*Corresponding author g.black@ucl.ac.uk

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

Stroke patients do better if they are treated in a specialist stroke unit. There are eight such units in London, providing care in the first hours following stroke. Some research has suggested that stroke patients who are admitted to hospital at the weekend or at night are more likely to die or to receive a lower standard of care. We wanted to know if this was the case in London, where the specialist stroke units provide a '24 hours a day, 7 days a week', service.

We studied the London specialist stroke units to find out:

- whether or not patients who were admitted at night or at the weekend had the same outcomes and quality of care as those admitted during the day
- how the specialist stroke units were trying to make sure that patients all received consistent care and whether or not this was value for money
- what staff and patients thought about care during the day, at night and at weekends.

We found that patients admitted to a specialised stroke unit at night and at the weekend were not more likely to die or incur a severe disability than patients admitted during the week or in the daytime. Patients also received important care, such as scans and clot-busting treatments, whatever time of day they were admitted. There were organisational differences in specialist stroke units out of hours. For example, there were fewer therapists in the ward and fewer senior doctors at night. We found that it was important to have a senior nurse in charge on the ward, rather than a junior one. It was also harder for staff to contact outside agencies, such as social services, that are less available at the weekend. If you come in on a Friday or at the weekend, then you are more likely to have to stay in hospital longer than if you come in during the week.

Our findings suggest that London's specialist stroke units are providing a good service but that there are still times when patients receive poorer care during the week.

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