

1 **Weekly variation in healthcare quality across day and time: nationwide**  
2 **registry based prospective cohort study of acute stroke care**

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41 **Abstract**

42 **Background**

43 Studies in many health systems have found evidence of poorer quality of  
44 healthcare for patients admitted on weekends or overnight (the "weekend  
45 effect"). We hypothesised that variation in quality was dependent on not just day  
46 but also time of admission and aimed to describe the pattern and magnitude of  
47 24/7 variation in the quality of acute stroke care occurring across the entire  
48 week.

49 **Methods**

50 Nationwide registry based prospective cohort study. Data were from the Sentinel  
51 Stroke National Audit Programme of 74307 patients admitted with acute stroke  
52 in England and Wales. Adjusted odds for thirteen measures of acute stroke care  
53 quality were estimated by fitting multilevel multivariable regression models  
54 across 42, four hour time periods per week.

55 **Findings**

56 Care quality varied across the entire week, and not just between weekends and  
57 weekdays, with different quality measures showing different patterns and  
58 magnitudes of variation. Four patterns of variation were identified: a diurnal  
59 pattern (e.g. dysphagia screening), a day of the week pattern (e.g. physiotherapy  
60 assessment), an off hours pattern (e.g. door to needle time for thrombolysis) and  
61 a flow pattern where quality changed sequentially across days (stroke unit  
62 admission). The largest magnitude of variation was for door to needle time  
63 within 60 minutes (Range 35-66%, coefficient of variation 18.2). There was no

64 evidence of a difference in 30 day survival between weekends and weekdays  
65 (adjusted OR 1.03, 0.95-1.13) but patients admitted overnight on weekdays had  
66 lower odds of survival (adjusted OR 0.90, 0.82-0.99).

### 67 **Interpretation**

68 The "weekend effect" is a simplification, and just one of several patterns of  
69 weekly variation occurring in the quality of stroke care. Weekly 24/7 variation  
70 should also be sought for in other healthcare settings and quality improvement  
71 should focus on reducing 24/7 variation in quality and not just the weekend  
72 effect.

### 73 **Funding**

74 National Institute of Health Research

75

76

77 **Research In Context**

78 **Evidence before this study**

79 We carried out a literature search of the MEDLINE database for English language  
80 studies published prior to June 2015 describing temporal variation in healthcare  
81 quality. The primary focus was to identify studies of stroke care but we also  
82 carried out searches to identify studies in other clinical settings. The search  
83 included the following terms: "Weekend", "Weekend effect", "Off hours",  
84 "Temporal variation", " AND Stroke", "AND quality". Studies of the weekend  
85 effect were identified in a wide range of clinical settings and geographies,  
86 describing evidence of poorer outcomes for patients admitted on the weekend or  
87 overnight with MI, stroke and general emergency admissions. We identified only  
88 a small number of studies that considered variation across both time of  
89 admission and day of week, including a study of obstetric outcomes in California  
90 and a study of hospital inpatients from Australia.

91 **Added value of this study**

92 We found evidence that in acute stroke care, the weekend effect is just one of  
93 several patterns of variation in quality that occur in real world practice. Quality  
94 varied across the whole week and different aspects of quality showed different  
95 patterns of variation.

96 **Implications of all the available evidence**

97 These findings imply that in acute stroke care, the weekend effect is a simplification  
98 of the true extent of temporal variation in healthcare quality that occurs across the  
99 week. A focus just on reducing differences in care quality between weekends and

100 weekdays will therefore not fully address the problem of variation in healthcare  
101 quality across the week. Although we only looked at stroke care, the findings from  
102 previous studies observing the weekend effect in a wide variety of clinical setting  
103 suggests that these 24/7 variations in quality might also be pervasive across acute  
104 healthcare settings, and should be sought for and be a focus of quality improvement  
105 efforts.

106

107

## 108 **Introduction**

109

110 It is now well recognised that the quality of healthcare that patients receive may  
111 in part be determined by when they are admitted to hospital.<sup>1</sup> The "weekend  
112 effect" (poorer care quality and outcomes for patients admitted at the weekend)  
113 or "off hours effect" (poorer care outside of usual working hours) have been  
114 observed in many studies across a wide variety of clinical presentations.<sup>2,3,4</sup>  
115 Such studies have had a major, and sometimes contentious, impact on health  
116 policy, for example by prompting moves to increase the number of doctors  
117 working in hospitals at weekends.<sup>5</sup> However, our understanding of why  
118 healthcare quality may be worse overnight or at the weekend is lacking in  
119 evidence and remains largely speculative<sup>6</sup>, creating difficulty in guiding health  
120 policy and quality improvement. Moreover, previous studies have generally  
121 taken the approach of comparing weekdays with weekends, or regular and off-  
122 hours, rather than measuring care quality across both day of the week and time.  
123 This risks obscuring other patterns of temporal variation in care quality which  
124 might occur and which might have important implications for understanding and  
125 improving the quality of healthcare services.

126

127 We therefore aimed to describe the pattern and magnitude of 24/7 variation in  
128 multiple domains of care quality for people admitted to hospital with acute  
129 stroke. Globally, stroke is the second leading cause of death<sup>7</sup> and the third largest  
130 contributor to disease burden<sup>8</sup>. There is good quality evidence for acute  
131 interventions (such as intravenous thrombolysis and organised stroke unit care)  
132 effective in improving outcomes after stroke<sup>9</sup>: how quickly acute stroke care is

133 delivered is therefore both important and can be measured against evidence  
134 based standards. Our hypothesis was that care quality is dependent on not just  
135 day but also time of admission.

136

## 137 **Methods**

138

139 The study was carried out using data from the Sentinel Stroke National Audit  
140 Programme (SSNAP), the national register of stroke care in England and Wales.  
141 SSNAP collects data on the clinical characteristics and care quality (measuring  
142 multiple aspects of care from the time of admission up to six months after  
143 stroke) of patients admitted to all acute admitting hospitals in England and  
144 Wales with acute ischaemic stroke or primary intracerebral haemorrhage. Data  
145 were collected prospectively and validated by clinical teams and entered into the  
146 SSNAP database using a secure web interface. The investigators used an  
147 anonymised extract of this database. SSNAP is estimated to include  
148 approximately 95% of all adults admitted to hospital in England and Wales with  
149 stroke.<sup>10</sup>

150

151 Care quality was measured using a pre-existing set of quality indicators reported  
152 routinely by SSNAP<sup>10</sup>, which are derived from UK national guidelines.<sup>9</sup> These  
153 indicators reflect the time critical nature of acute stroke care: Receiving a brain  
154 scan within one hour or 12 hours of admission, direct admission to a stroke unit  
155 (or intensive care unit/high dependency unit) within four hours of admission,  
156 administration of intravenous thrombolysis with alteplase, door to needle time



157 of <60minutes for patients treated with thrombolysis, dysphagia screen within 4  
158 hours of admission, reviews by a stroke specialist physician and nurse within 24  
159 hours of admission, and assessments by physiotherapy, occupational therapy  
160 and speech and language therapy within 72 hours. Patients with clinical  
161 exclusions for dysphagia screening or therapy assessments (e.g. being treated  
162 palliatively only) were excluded from the denominator of these specific  
163 indicators. Only patients with ischaemic stroke presenting within 4.5 hours of  
164 stroke onset were included in the denominator for thrombolysis. The outcome  
165 measure was 30-day post admission survival.

166

167 The cohort was all adult patients (aged >16 years) admitted to hospital with  
168 acute stroke (ischaemic or primary intracerebral haemorrhage) in England and  
169 Wales from April 2013-March 2014.

170

171 SSNAP has approval to collect patient data under Section 251 of the NHS Act  
172 2006 from the Confidentiality Advisory Group of the Health Research Authority.  
173 No additional ethical approval was sought.

174

## 175 **Statistical Analysis**

### 176 *Time Stratification*

177 We carried out time stratified analyses by classifying patients according to time  
178 of admission. The time of stroke onset was used instead for patients with stroke  
179 occurring as an inpatient. Two methods for stratifying time were used. Firstly,  
180 using six, four-hour time blocks per day of week (Midnight to 03:59 , 04:00 to

181 07:59, 08:00 to 11:59, 12:00 to 15:59, 16:00 to 19:59 and 20:00 to 23:59),  
182 resulting in 42 time categories in total. Periods of four hours were chosen  
183 because it was the shortest time period that provided sufficient numbers of  
184 patients in each block for model fitting ( $\approx 350+$ ). Secondly we used larger time  
185 periods corresponding to weekends/weekdays and office/off hours, in order to  
186 aid comparison with previous literature on weekend effects: Monday-Friday  
187 0800-1959, Saturday-Sunday 0800-1959, Monday-Friday 2000-0759 and  
188 Saturday-Sunday 2000-0759.

189

190

#### 191 *Model fitting*

192 The magnitude of variation in care quality between time blocks was quantified  
193 by calculating the coefficient of variation (CoV; the ratio of the standard  
194 deviation to the mean, multiplied by 100). The CoV was used because it allows  
195 the dispersion of variables with different means to be compared.

196

197 Multivariable analysis was carried out by fitting multilevel<sup>11</sup> logistic regression  
198 models including patient age, sex, place of stroke onset (inpatient or out of  
199 hospital), stroke type, vascular comorbidity (atrial fibrillation, heart failure,  
200 diabetes mellitus, previous stroke or TIA, hypertension), pre-stroke functional  
201 level (as measured by the modified Rankin score<sup>12</sup>), time from stroke onset to  
202 admission, stroke severity (National Institutes of Health stroke score, or the level  
203 of consciousness on admission) and hospital level random intercepts. Time  
204 categories were included as fixed effects. The middle ranking time period (21st)  
205 in the unadjusted analyses was used as the reference category in the models

206 using 42 time blocks per week, and Mon-Fri 0800-1959 was used as the  
207 reference category in the models using four time blocks per week. Adjusted  
208 absolute effect sizes were calculated using marginal standardisation<sup>13</sup>.

209

### 210 *Sensitivity Analyses*

211 Data were 100% complete for all baseline variables apart from NIHSS on  
212 admission, which was available for 54048 patients (73%). We carried out  
213 sensitivity analyses to explore the effect of these missing data. Firstly, models  
214 were fitted using level of consciousness on admission (which was available for  
215 100% of patients) as a proxy for stroke severity, and the results compared to  
216 models using NIHSS. Secondly, models were fitted following multiple  
217 imputation<sup>14</sup> of 20 datasets. Sensitivity analyses were also carried out after  
218 excluding patients who died within 1 day of admission.

219

220 Analyses and visualisations were carried out using Stata 14 (StataCorp, College  
221 Station, TX).

222

## 223 **Results**

224

225 There were 74307 patients with acute stroke admitted to 199 hospitals. The  
226 median age of patients was 77 (IQR - Interquartile range 67-85) and 65193  
227 (88%) had an ischaemic stroke [Figure 1]. The most frequent day of admission  
228 was Monday (16%), and admissions were less frequent on Saturdays (13%) and  
229 Sundays (13%) compared to weekdays. Discharges from hospital were less

230 common at weekends, with only 6% and 3% of hospital discharges occurring on  
231 Saturday and Sunday respectively.

232

233 There was wide variation in both the magnitude and pattern of temporal  
234 variation in quality across the 13 quality indicators [Figure 2]. In unadjusted  
235 analyses, the greatest magnitude of variation was observed for door to needle  
236 time of < 60 minutes, which ranged from 35-66% (Coefficient of Variation 18.2).  
237 The indicators with the smallest variation were 30 day survival, which ranged  
238 from 80-90 % (CoV 3.1) and assessment by a stroke nurse (Range 77-90%, CoV  
239 3.5).

240

241 We observed four main patterns of 24/7 variation in the heatmaps and these  
242 were similar in both the unadjusted and multivariable analyses of each indicator  
243 [Figs 3-6]. Four of the indicators showed a diurnal pattern of variation, with  
244 quality varying across time of day (dysphagia screen, brain scan within 12 hours,  
245 brain scan within 1 hour, thrombolysis). This variation was not only restricted to  
246 differences between daytimes and overnight – for example patients arriving  
247 during the morning were more likely to receive a brain scan within one hour  
248 compared to those admitted in the afternoon [Figure 3]. Six of the indicators  
249 varied across days of the week, with lower quality care for weekend admissions  
250 (stroke physician assessment and nurse assessment) [Figure 4] or for patients  
251 admitted on a Thursday or Friday (Physiotherapy, occupational therapy,  
252 communication SLT therapy and swallow SLT assessments) [Figure 5]. The third  
253 pattern was for a poorer care both overnight and at the weekend (door-to-  
254 needle time for thrombolysis). The fourth pattern was of sequential change in

255 quality across both day and time, with quality improving sequentially across  
256 weekdays and then deteriorating at the weekend, resulting in patients on  
257 Mondays having the lowest odds of being admitted to a stroke unit within four  
258 hours [Figure 4].

259

260 There was no evidence for a difference in adjusted 30 day survival between  
261 patients admitted during the day at the weekend compared to weekdays [Figure  
262 7 and Web Appendix] in the models using either NIHSS (aOR 1.03, 0.95-1.13) or  
263 level of consciousness (aOR 0.97, 0.91-1.04). There was weak evidence that  
264 survival was worse for patients admitted overnight on weekdays, (aOR 0.90,  
265 0.82-0.99; absolute difference in adjusted survival -0.7%, -1.2 to -0.2). The point  
266 estimate and confidence intervals of survival for patients admitted overnight at  
267 weekends differed between models – there was evidence that survival was  
268 poorer in the models using level of consciousness (aOR 0.84, 0.77-0.93; absolute  
269 difference -1.5%, -2.3 to -0.7%) and with multiply imputed NIHSS (aOR 0.86,  
270 0.77-0.95) but not in the model using NIHSS (aOR 0.89, 0.78-1.01). The  
271 sensitivity analyses using imputed datasets and excluding patients dying within  
272 one day of admission were otherwise similar - the only change of note in the  
273 latter sensitivity analysis was a modest reduction in effect size for brain scanning  
274 within 1 hour.

275

276 **Discussion**

277

278 Variations in the quality of acute stroke care were found to occur across the  
279 whole week and not just between weekends and weekdays, with individual  
280 indicators of care quality differing in the magnitude and pattern of variation.  
281 This suggests that even within a single, well defined clinical pathway such as  
282 acute stroke care, temporal variation is a complex phenomenon that probably  
283 has multiple causes. Our findings indicate that the concept of the “weekend  
284 effect” is a major simplification of the true extent and nature of temporal  
285 variation in healthcare quality and that it is just one of a number of patterns of  
286 variation in care quality that occur in real world clinical practice. Unmasking  
287 these potentially hidden sources of variation in quality through appropriate data  
288 collection and visualisation might help in identifying the factors causing  
289 variation in quality (such as staffing levels or bed capacity) and has the potential  
290 of being an important tool for quality improvement in healthcare.

291

292 There is an extensive previous literature exploring differences in care quality  
293 and outcomes between weekdays and weekends.<sup>2,3,4,15,16</sup> [Research in Context  
294 Panel]. Some studies have also described differences in care between daytimes  
295 and overnight<sup>17</sup> and between regular hours and off-hours<sup>18</sup>. Studies of the  
296 weekend effect in stroke care specifically have been conflicting. Some have found  
297 evidence for reduced quality of care (but no difference in mortality) for patients  
298 admitted on weekends <sup>19</sup>, and the evidence for differences in mortality between  
299 weekend and weekday admissions is mixed.<sup>20,21,22</sup> These differences might be  
300 explained by differences in how stroke care services are organised<sup>22</sup>, and there is  
301 evidence that low nurse staffing levels on stroke units are associated with higher  
302 mortality at weekends.<sup>23</sup>

303

304 The limitation of much of the previous literature on the "weekend effect" is that  
305 it has typically been based on comparisons of weekends versus weekdays, or  
306 regular versus off-hours, without taking into account variation that might occur  
307 across both day of the week and time of day. There are however a small number  
308 of studies that have considered how care might vary in this way. For example,  
309 administrative data has been used to model daily and diurnal patterns in  
310 mortality risk as part of a prognostic model for hospital inpatients<sup>24</sup> and  
311 identified weekend effects lagging into the following week.<sup>25</sup> Diurnal patterns  
312 have also been observed in the frequency of obstetric complications.<sup>26</sup> It  
313 therefore seems likely that the patterns of healthcare quality we observed in this  
314 study are not restricted to stroke care and would be found in other acute  
315 healthcare settings if they were sought for.

316

317 We identified four main patterns of temporal variation in stroke care quality and  
318 we hypothesise that they reflect differing underlying causal factors. This study is  
319 not able to identify what these causal factors are, but may generate hypotheses  
320 for future studies. Recognising characteristic patterns of variation might be  
321 useful in helping identify and tackle these underlying causes and so organise  
322 healthcare services more effectively.

323

324 The diurnal patterns we observed may be the result of reduced clinical services  
325 overnight – such as lower staffing levels or reduced access to diagnostics.  
326 However, we found that variation in quality also occurred during usual working  
327 hours, suggesting that there may be other contributory factors. For example, that

328 patients admitted in the afternoon were less likely to get an urgent brain scan  
329 than those admitted in the morning might be due to higher demand for CT  
330 scanning at busier times of the day.

331

332 Variation in quality that relates directly to admission on, or in relation to the  
333 weekend suggests that how healthcare is organised on the weekend affects  
334 quality. Survey data show that stroke services in England and Wales are more  
335 likely to provide seven day physiotherapy than occupational therapy or speech  
336 therapy services<sup>10</sup> - consistent with the pattern of variation seen in this study.

337 The data are also evidence that the provision of healthcare on weekends may  
338 also affect patients admitted on other days of the week, with patients admitted  
339 on Thursdays and Fridays experiencing the longest waits for therapy  
340 assessment.

341

342 One indicator (door to needle time) showed a strong relationship to both day of  
343 week and time of day, with reduced performance both overnight and at  
344 weekends. Achieving fast door to needle times in acute stroke requires that the  
345 entire diagnostic, decision making and treatment pathway is carried out quickly  
346 – if just one stage is slow then this may cause critical delays in the whole  
347 pathway. Interventions that require this type of rapid coordinated, systems  
348 response with on-site presence of key decision makers might be therefore show  
349 the greatest magnitude of 24/7 variation.

350

351 The pattern of care quality observed for stroke unit access seems most likely to  
352 reflect patient flow and bed capacity within stroke care services. We hypothesise



353 that this is due to loss of spare bed capacity over the weekend as a result of  
354 reduced frequency of hospital discharges, resulting in the slowest transfers to  
355 stroke units occurring on Mondays.

356

357 Variation in survival after stroke was largely explained by differences in patient  
358 characteristics, with proportionally more unwell patients being admitted during  
359 off hours. Therefore one of the reasons for apparent temporal variation in care  
360 quality are factors which determine when and how patients present to  
361 healthcare services. It is possible therefore that the conflicting nature of the  
362 literature on the presence or not of the weekend effect reflects the ability of  
363 different studies to control for this source of confounding.<sup>27</sup>

364

365 Further research could help to test these hypotheses and identify the reasons for  
366 these patterns of temporal variation, identify new patterns of temporal variation  
367 and perhaps aid in developing new taxonomies of temporal variation in  
368 healthcare quality. In the meantime, these findings imply that there will not be a  
369 single solution to eradicating time based inequalities in care. Solutions are likely  
370 to require not just ensuring appropriate clinical staffing but also measures to  
371 improve the capacity and utilisation of beds, generate more efficient patient flow,  
372 improve access to diagnostic and clinical support services, and improve the  
373 overall resilience of care pathways. They also need to consider the wider  
374 healthcare system and not just the hospital in isolation, such as the availability of  
375 social care and community services at the weekends, on which patient  
376 discharges from hospital are dependent. Much of the current discourse on  
377 reducing weekend effects has occurred in the absence of a detailed

378 understanding of why temporal variation in care quality occurs. Since solutions  
379 are likely to come at significant financial and opportunity cost<sup>28</sup>, policy makers,  
380 healthcare managers and funders need to ensure that the reasons for temporal  
381 variation in quality are properly understood and that resources are targeted  
382 appropriately. For example, simply transferring clinicians from weekdays to  
383 weekends may not have the intended effect on quality and may lead to  
384 unintended consequences for the quality of care provided on weekdays. One  
385 potential method for gaining a better insight into variations in care quality might  
386 be to make use of the types of data visualisations we have used in this study,  
387 which is becoming increasingly feasible as electronic healthcare data increases in  
388 scope and detail.

389

390

### 391 **Limitations**

392 Overall the data were very complete and strengthened by being from a national  
393 registry of clinical (rather than administrative) data, but data were missing for  
394 one variable. Although the main analysis used a complete case analysis, we  
395 found that the study results were similar when a proxy measure was used, and  
396 when multiple imputation was used to account for missing data. Outcomes were  
397 measured using survival, which although important is a relatively limited  
398 measure of stroke outcomes. The study have been strengthened by other  
399 measures such as disability and quality of life. Nonetheless, most of the process  
400 measures used in this study have a strong empirical rationale from randomised  
401 controlled trial evidence<sup>29,30</sup>, and longer term disability data are not currently

402 available in SSNAP. There appeared to be little similarity in the pattern of  
403 variation between survival and the other quality measures , which might be  
404 because these interventions do not influence survival (e.g. thrombolysis reduces  
405 disability but not mortality <sup>29</sup>) or that associations exists at the patient level but  
406 not at the group level. The study used time sensitive care quality indicators,  
407 which are likely to be more subject to temporal variation than aspects of care  
408 where timeliness is less important. The use of these indicators was however not  
409 arbitrary, and the study used the already existing national set of acute stroke  
410 indicators. We used the relatively simple method of stratifying by time rather  
411 than fitting more complex time series models; this has the disadvantage of  
412 assuming that time changes in blocks rather than continuously. In future studies  
413 we plan to explore different methods to model the effect of day of week and time  
414 of day, and use larger datasets to reduce the time resolution to shorter time  
415 periods.

416

417

## 418 **Summary**

419

420 We found evidence that care quality in acute stroke care varies with time in  
421 much more complex ways than previous studies of the “weekend effect” in  
422 healthcare would suggest. Although this study is of the quality of care received  
423 by people with acute stroke, it seems unlikely that stroke is alone in displaying  
424 such patterns of temporal variation in quality. Extending this methodology to  
425 other areas of healthcare, particularly for presentations where the timeliness of  
426 care is an important determinant of outcomes (such as acute myocardial

427 infarction or surgical emergencies) would be useful further areas of research.  
428 Finally, this study suggests that there is a need for a more sophisticated  
429 understanding of the patterns of and reasons for temporal variation in care  
430 quality and that this should become a routine part of quality improvement in  
431 healthcare.  
432

	<b>Characteristic</b>
n	74307
Female (n, %)	37434 (50)
Age (Median, IQR)	77 years (67-85)
Stroke Type (n,%)	
<i>Ischaemic</i>	65193 (88)
<i>ICH</i>	8038 (11)
<i>Undetermined</i>	1076 (2)
Pre stroke modified Rankin Scale (n,%)	
<i>0</i>	42524 (57)
<i>1</i>	11311 (15)
<i>2</i>	7011 (9)
<i>3</i>	7801 (11)
<i>4</i>	4249 (6)
<i>5</i>	1391 (2)
NIHSS on arrival (Median, IQR)	4 (2-10)
Level of consciousness on arrival (n,%)	
<i>0 (Alert)</i>	61638 (83)
<i>1 (Not alert: Responds to voice)</i>	7482 (10)
<i>2 (Not alert: Responds to pain)</i>	2978 (4)
<i>3 (Totally unresponsive)</i>	2209 (3)
Co-Morbidity (n,%)	
<i>Heart failure</i>	4079 (6)
<i>Hypertension</i>	39918 (54)
<i>Atrial fibrillation</i>	15385 (11)
<i>Diabetes mellitus</i>	14424 (19)
<i>Previous stroke or TIA</i>	20292 (27)
Onset in hospital (n,%)	3969 (5)
Time from onset to admission, minutes (n,%)	
<i>Unclear symptom onset (eg wake up stroke)</i>	28739 (39)
<i>&lt;180</i>	25441 (34)
<i>180-359</i>	7126 (10)
<i>&gt;360</i>	13001 (18)
Day of admission (n,%)	
<i>Sun</i>	9515 (13)
<i>Mon</i>	11618 (16)
<i>Tue</i>	11077 (15)
<i>Wed</i>	11058 (15)
<i>Thu</i>	10882 (15)
<i>Fri</i>	10756 (15)
<i>Sat</i>	9401 (13)
Day of discharge if discharged alive (n,%)	

<i>Sun</i>	1955 (3)
<i>Mon</i>	10701 (17)
<i>Tue</i>	11467 (18)
<i>Wed</i>	11012 (18)
<i>Thu</i>	11061 (18)
<i>Fri</i>	13268 (21)
<i>Sat</i>	3578 (6)
30 day survival (n,%)	64597 (87)

433

434 **Fig 1.** Characteristics of the cohort

435

436

437

438

	<b>Mean (SD)</b>	<b>Range in quality from lowest to highest time category (n, %)</b>	<b>Coefficient of Variation</b>
Thrombolysis rate (%)	32.1 (3.9)	38/179 - 76/205 21-37%	12.6
Door to needle time <60 minutes (%)	49.1 (8.9)	16/46 - 232/350 35-66%	18.2
Brain scan within 1 hour (%)	41.7 (2.8)	186/543 - 1403/2980 34-47%	6.6
Brain scan within 12 hours (%)	84.0 (7.3)	1815/2510 - 2837/2980 72-95%	8.7
Stroke unit admission within 4 hours (%)	56.4 (4.5)	293/607 - 2026/3086 46-65	8.0
Dysphagia screen within 4 hours (%)	61.5 (5.8)	249/495 - 1911/2624 50-73%	9.4
Stroke physician within 24 hours (%)	71.8 (9.8)	266/543 - 1148/1351 49-85%	13.6
Stroke nurse within 24 hours (%)	85.4 (3.0)	394/509 - 2784/3086 77-90%	3.5
Physiotherapy assessment within 72 hours (%)	93.0 (3.9)	363/447 - 551/566 81-97%	4.2
Occupational therapy assessment within 72 hours (%)	85.8 (5.4)	293/415 - 1830/1998 71-92%	6.3
Communication SLT assessment within 72 hours (%)	77.4 (8.9)	620/1253 - 623/700 50-89%	11.5
Swallow SLT assessment within 72 hours (%)	78.3 (5.6)	749/1184 - 263/301 63-87%	7.2
30 day survival (%)	85.9 (2.6)	432/543 - 2918/3252 80-90%	3.1

439 **Fig 2.** Care quality across the 42 time categories in the week. Thrombolysis rate

440 is of patients with ischaemic stroke presenting within 4.5 hours of stroke onset.

441

442 **Fig 3.** Heatmap showing variation in thrombolysis, door to needle time, brain

443 scan within 1 hour and brain scan within 12 hours

444 **Fig 4.** Heatmap showing variation in stroke unit admission, dysphagia screen  
445 within 4 hours, stroke physician within 24 hours and stroke nurse within 24  
446 hours

447

448 **Fig 5.** Heatmap showing variation in physiotherapy assessment within 72 hours,  
449 occupational therapy assessment within 72 hours, communication speech and  
450 language therapist (SLT) assessment within 72 hours, swallow SLT assessment  
451 within 72 hours

452

453 **Fig 6.** Heatmap showing variation in 30 day survival

454



455

456

457

458

	Weekday 0800- 1959	Weekend 0800-1959		Weekday 2000-0759		Weekend 2000-0759	
	-	OR	95%CI	OR	95%CI	OR	95%CI
Thrombolysis	REF	0.86	0.79-0.95	0.67	0.61-0.74	0.73	0.64-0.84
Door to needle time < 60 minutes	REF	0.55	0.47-0.63	0.40	0.34-0.46	0.35	0.28-0.43
Brain scan within 1 hour	REF	0.83	0.78-0.87	0.76	0.72-0.80	0.72	0.66-0.78
Brain scan within 12 hours	REF	0.76	0.70-0.81	0.51	0.47-0.55	0.51	0.45-0.57
Stroke unit admission within 4 hours	REF	0.78	0.74-0.83	0.71	0.67-0.75	0.67	0.61-0.73
Dysphagia screen within 4 hours	REF	0.75	0.71-0.79	0.61	0.58-0.65	0.55	0.50-0.60
Stroke physician within 24 hours	REF	0.42	0.40-0.45	0.77	0.72-0.82	0.34	0.31-0.37
Specialist stroke nurse within 24 hours	REF	0.63	0.58-0.68	0.80	0.73-0.88	0.48	0.42-0.54
Physiotherapy assessment within 72 hours	REF	1.25	1.11-1.40	0.95	0.85-1.07	1.00	0.84-1.19
Occupational therapy assessment within 72 hours	REF	1.18	1.08-1.29	0.94	0.87-1.03	1.03	0.90-1.18
Communication assessment by SLT within 72 hours	REF	1.25	1.14-1.37	1.09	0.99-1.20	1.05	0.91-1.22
Swallow assessment by SLT within 72 hours	REF	1.10	1.00-1.23	1.04	0.94-1.16	0.94	0.80-1.11
30 day survival	REF	1.03	0.95-1.13	0.90	0.82-0.99	0.89	0.78-1.01

459

460 **Fig 7** Adjusted odds ratio of receiving each of care quality indicator.

461 Multivariable model including stroke severity (NIHSS), age, sex, stroke type,

462 place of stroke onset, pre stroke level of functioning, vascular comorbidity,

463 elapsed time from stroke onset to admission and hospital level random

464 intercepts

465

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616

### 617 **Contributions**

618 BDB – Devised the study, carried out the analysis and wrote the manuscript

619 GCC – Wrote the manuscript, provided clinical insight and critical commentary

620 MAJ – Wrote the manuscript, provided clinical insight and critical commentary

621 HH – Wrote the manuscript, and provided critical commentary

622 LP – Carried out the analysis and wrote the manuscript

623 KS – Wrote the manuscript, and provided critical commentary

624 PJT - Wrote the manuscript, provided clinical insight and critical commentary

625 CDAW - Wrote the manuscript, and provided critical commentary

626 AGR – Wrote the manuscript, provided clinical insight and critical commentary

627

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