Author's response to reviews

Title: A comparison between reported staffing levels and the Department of Health staffing guidelines for stroke rehabilitation: A UK national survey.

Authors:

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor,

Thank you for the feedback received March 25th. We have incorporated the comments as follows:

Reviewer Kilbride:

We have altered the manuscript title “A comparison between reported therapy staffing levels and Department of Health therapy staffing guidelines for stroke rehabilitation: A national survey.

We have concentrated the abstract on the question of staffing levels (Abstract page 2). As mentioned the data for this analysis was extracted from a larger survey and the demographic section enabled us to look at staffing levels.

We have made a stronger case for the weak underpinning of the staffing guidelines currently used in stroke units in England (Introduction page 4 and 5).

Reviewer Kilbride begins “not all patients in every 10 beds will require each of the therapies.” We have strengthened the point that our analysis is based on the number of patients deemed eligible for treatment. (Results p11).

Reviewer Kilbride begins “I find it hard to understand how more OTs (2.1 WTE)...” We have strengthened the point that our analysis is based on the percentage of direct patient time and that 46% of physiotherapists’ time is direct with patients. This will result in a lower ratio of PTs than OTs (33%) or SALTs (25%). (Results p11, Discussion p. 13, Conclusions p.17).

Reviewer Kilbride – we have included the median 2009 staffing levels in Table 1

Reviewer Kilbride begins “How many of the 13,000 patients will require therapy?” This is unnecessary. Our analysis was based on the percentage of patients deemed eligible for therapy. The remainder of that paragraph relates to the Therapy Consensus Conference.

Reviewer Kilbride begins “My NSSA (2010) report...” The NSSA (2010) reports 33% in the Figure and 32% in the Table but 33% is repeated elsewhere so we have changed to 33%.

Reviewer Kilbride – professional make-up of the Advisory Panel included (Method p.6)

Reviewer Kilbride – outcome of pilot included (Method p.6)

Reviewer Kilbride – spelling error corrected

Discussion Section - Reviewer Kilbride – references checked and corrected; percentages checked and corrected.

Reviewer Jones

Reviewer Jones comments relate to the larger survey in the supplementary file.

Reviewer Jones begins “It is not clear to me whether the study analysed data about stroke units...” We did not understand this paragraph. The abstract states 19 of the 37 in-patient hospital care units
that had no missing data for staff numbers, unit bed numbers, number of stroke patients treated per annum, average length of stay, and average occupancy rates (p. 2). These inclusion criteria are also stated in the Data Analysis section on p. 8.

Reviewer Jones begins “However, the interpretation of the data did not consider therapy assistants…” Explanation added in Limitations section p. 16.

Reviewer Jones begins “I was not sure of the rationale…” As stated the collaboration we had with the Networks provided contact names. From the same paragraph selection bias is now included in the limitations section p. 15.

Typing error corrected on p. 16.

We believe these address the points raised.

Sincerely,

Dr Gabrielle McHugh

Professor Ian Swain