

How much rehabilitation is delivered by therapy assistants? Data from the Sentinel Stroke National Audit Programme (SSNAP)

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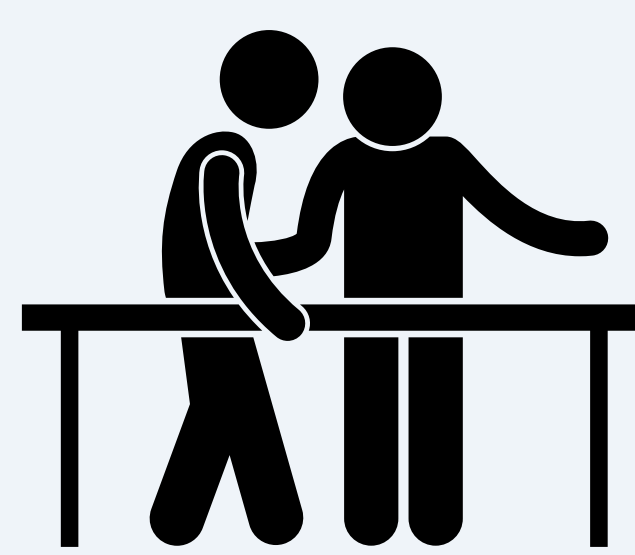
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Background

National guidelines for stroke recommend at least 45 minutes of each relevant therapy for a minimum of 5 days per week for those able to participate. We investigated how rehabilitation provided by therapy assistants supports the provision of therapy within acute stroke services.

Method

The Sentinel Stroke National Audit Programme (SSNAP) measures the process, structure, and outcomes of stroke services in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Therapy staffing levels were analysed across all disciplines (Physiotherapy [PT], Occupational Therapy [OT], Speech and Language Therapy [SLT] and Psychology) for acute stroke care providers (n=157; SSNAP Acute Organisational Audit, October 2021). Therapy delivery for each discipline was analysed for patients treated by an acute provider between July 2021 and June 2022 (n=99,024; SSNAP clinical audit) across 190 acute hospitals.



Therapy by an assistant was recorded as therapy delivered independent of a qualified therapist. Therapy must be delivered under the supervision of a qualified therapist.

How did we measure therapy staffing and delivery?

Staffing levels are measured based on whole time equivalents (WTE), where 1.0 WTE is equivalent to a full-time worker, while 0.5 WTE is half-time, etc. Minutes are recorded as the total minutes of therapy (per discipline) received across the patient's entire stay with a hospital. Hospitals record the total number of therapy minutes (qualified + non-registered), as well as those provided solely by a therapy assistant.

Results

The total national WTE for all therapy staff was 5.27 per 10 beds, of which the total national WTE of therapy assistants was 1.27 per 10 beds. Figure 1 shows total WTE across all disciplines and per discipline nationally. The median percentage of total WTE made up by therapy assistants was 24%. For PT, the percentage of WTE composed of therapy assistants was 25.6%, for OT 25.2%, for SLT 18.4% and for psychology 21.3%. 6 services had no SLT staff and 88 no psychology staff.

Nationally, of those that received therapy from the relevant discipline, 29.0% of patients received PT from a therapy assistant, 34.2% OT, 18.2% SLT and 21.4% psychology (table 1). For those patients that received therapy from a therapy assistant, the national median proportion of minutes provided by a therapy assistant (out of total minutes received) was 26.8% (14.3-47.3%) for PT, 34.5% (20.0-56.3%) for OT, 39% (20.0-66.7%) for SLT and 100% (100%-100%) for psychology (figure 2).

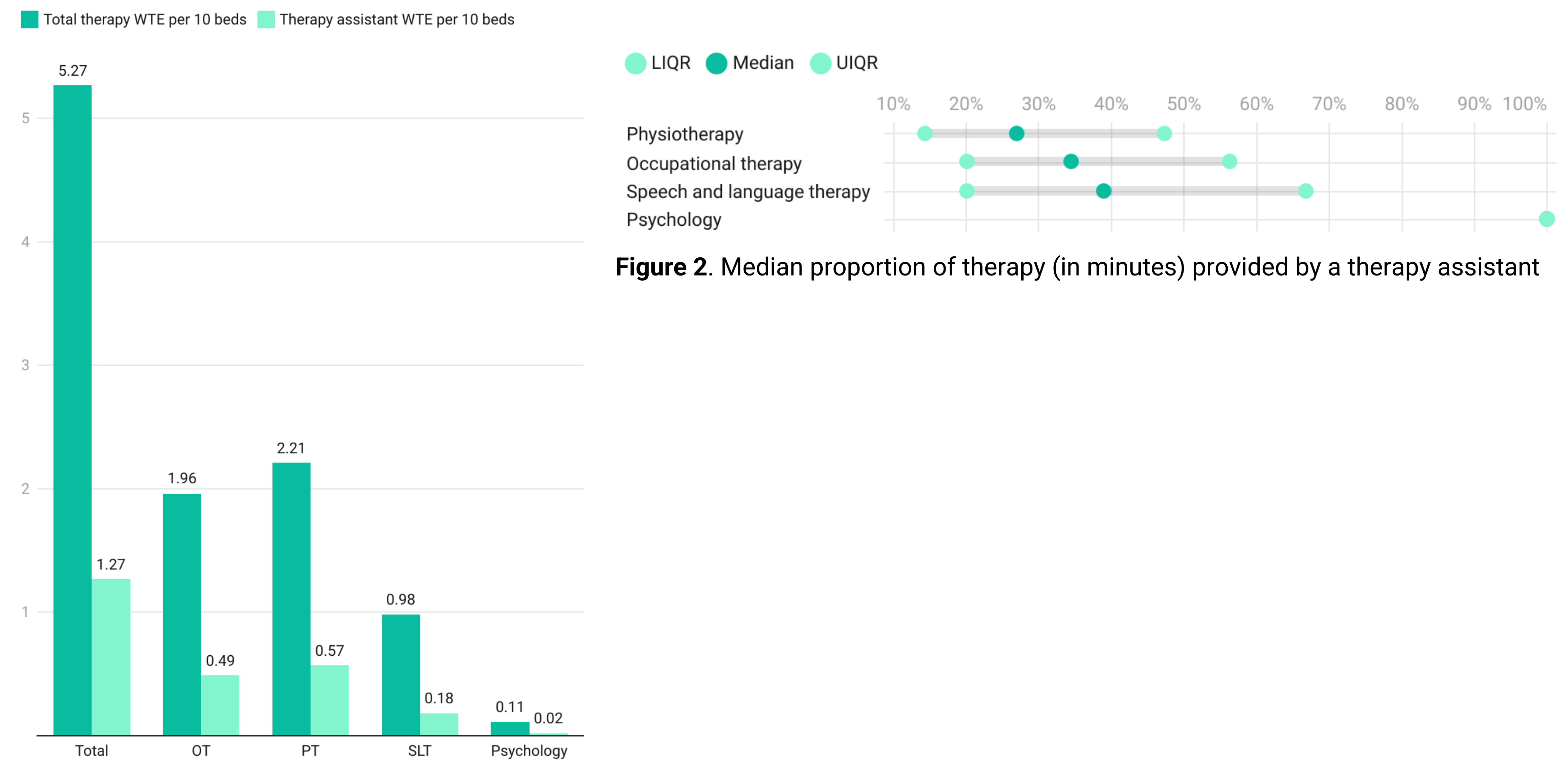


Figure 1. Total therapy staffing as WTE per 10 beds

| Therapy discipline | Applicable for therapy (no./% patients) | Received any therapy (no./% patients) | Received therapy from a therapy assistant (no./% patients) |
|-----------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| Physiotherapy | 82045 (82.9%) | 81845 (99.8%) | 23721 (29.0%) |
| Occupational therapy | 80834 (81.6%) | 80561 (99.7%) | 27560 (34.2%) |
| Speech and language therapy | 49578 (50.1%) | 49216 (99.3%) | 8952 (18.2%) |
| Psychology | 3365 (3.4%) | 2705 (80.4%) | 579 (21.4%) |

Table 1. Therapy provision by a therapy assistant

Discussion

Therapy assistants account for 24% of the overall therapy workforce and for OT, PT and SLT provide a median of 25-40% of therapy minutes. As information accumulates in SSNAP, this will enable us to better understand the relationship between therapy assistant resource, rehabilitation intensity and outcomes.

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