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The sky's the limit for stroke treatment

World-first research has uncovered encouraging news for rural and remote Australians who suffer a stroke.

The observational study was conducted by researchers at Gold Coast University Hospital. They found patients who were flown a great distance (average 1,350 kilometres) to a city-based stroke centre, can survive and recover well when they are diagnosed early, and their treatment begins before the flight.

Researchers compared the outcomes of patients who experienced an ultra-long aeromedical transfer to have a blood clot on their brain removed, with a group of urban patients who presented direct at Gold Coast University Hospital for the same treatment, known as endovascular thrombectomy or clot retrieval.

Project supervisor Dr Darshan Shah said when remote patients are flown to us from a far distance compared with local district presentation, both achieve comparable outcomes.

"This is an exciting result because these patients are coming from areas where stroke treatment is not available on site," Dr Shah said.

"While distance is a big obstacle, it should not mean greater disability or even death. All Australians deserve access to time-critical treatment we know saves lives."

When a stroke occurs, more than 1.9 million brain cells die each minute, but prompt treatment can stop this damage. The ultimate goal is for stroke to be diagnosed and treated within the "golden hour" after symptom onset to achieve the best outcomes.

The findings of this study, which assessed data from December 2018 to March 2020 from ten rural and remote sites in Queensland and one in Northern New South Wales, will be presented at the [30th Annual Scientific Meeting of the Stroke Society of Australasia](#) this week (October 12-15).

Stroke Society of Australasia (SSA) President Professor Bernard Yan said this research highlights the potential for future treatment.

"We must invest in technology that speeds up diagnosis of stroke and delivery of emergency treatment," Professor Yan said.

"There is much work currently underway to address the disparity of distance, including reducing the size and weight of brain scanners so they can be utilised on aircraft.

"This is vital work because rural and regional Australians are 17 percent more likely to have a stroke than people in metropolitan areas. There has also been a jump in the number of people moving away from our cities during the COVID-19 pandemic. We must ensure all Australians can access life-saving treatments for stroke when they need them."

Other key topics to be showcased at the SSA 2021 conference include the impact of the telestroke roll out in New South Wales, the role of diet in secondary prevention of stroke, disparities in the incidence of stroke between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations and lifestyle risk factors for young adult stroke.

The conference unites hundreds of stroke clinicians. It is being held largely online due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, while Western Australian locals will gather at Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre.

For more information visit <https://ssastrokeconference.com.au/>

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Stroke Foundation is marking its 25th anniversary during October, 2021. Its mission is to prevent stroke, save lives and enhance recovery. Visit www.strokefoundation.org.au

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