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While a recent study concluded that stroke patients may receive more aggressive treatment if they're admitted on Saturday or Sunday, several large-scale, multi-hospital studies have revealed that patients admitted for heart attack, stroke or other cardiac incidents are more likely to suffer complications and even face greater risk of dying, compared with those admitted during the week. Now, a new study from researchers at the University of Pennsylvania Medical School suggests that this "weekend effect" may not extend to care of trauma patients—people who are shot, stabbed, injured in car accidents, or suffer serious falls, for example—and that the systems used to provide round-the-clock high quality care for trauma victims may offer some insight into how hospitals can close the care gap for other patients.

The study, presented at a meeting of the Eastern Association for the Surgery of Trauma last week in Phoenix, included 4,382 patients admitted to the hospital at UPenn between 2006 and 2008. While 34% were admitted on weekends, and 23% were admitted in the wee hours of the morning (between midnight and 6am), none of the patients who arrived at the hospital during those times were more likely to die than those admitted during regular weekday hours. What's more, based on measures such as length of stay in intensive care units and time spent on ventilators, the researchers concluded that trauma patients admitted on weekends may have received slightly better care than those admitted during the week.

Of course, while these initial findings reveal promising levels of consistency in treating trauma patients, the authors emphasize the need for more research to determine whether trauma care is consistent at hospitals across the country, and whether any lessons from trauma care can be applied to other medical disciplines. Whereas many hospitals have
varying staff schedules depending on time of day or day of the week, regional protocols for helicopter and ambulance transport of trauma victims require that they be taken to facilities that meet specific requirements for trauma care. Additionally, because the UPenn hospital is a Level 1 trauma center, an attending trauma surgeon is available at all times.

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