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Hospital **death** rates rise if fewer **nurses** are on wards, says new research;   
Research suggests the drive to replaces **nurses** with less qualified staff should be reviewed  
  
**BYLINE:** Paul Gallagher

Death rates are higher on wards with fewer nurses, according to research that suggests the drive to replaces nurses with less qualified staff should be reviewed.

Experts studied 137 acute hospital trusts in England and found lower death rates when there were more nurses working. However, hospitals with healthcare support workers in higher numbers had patient death rates seven per cent higher.

Of the 31 trusts where the team knew the exact staffing ratio per patient, the researchers found that those with an average of six patients or fewer per registered nurse had 20 per cent lower death rates compared to trusts with more than 10 patients per nurse.

[[](http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/health-news/nurses-warn-nhs-not-to-cut-their-numbers-after-watchdog-announces-end-to-review-of-safe-staffing-10297838.html)](http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/health-news/nurses-warn-nhs-not-to-cut-their-numbers-after-watchdog-announces-end-to-review-of-safe-staffing-10297838.html)

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The findings, published in BMJ Open, also show a slight increase in patient deaths for trusts with the most healthcare support workers.

Lead researcher Jane Ball, from the University of Southampton, said: “At best, healthcare support workers make no difference, but at worst a higher level of support workers is linked to an increased risk of death during a hospital stay.

“The heavy reliance on support workers at the expense of registered nurses puts patient safety at risk. That’s a situation that can lead to more patients dying during their hospital stay.”

She said that introducing new roles - such as the nursing associate role announced by the Government in December - must be evaluated for their effect on patient safety.