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Low **nurse to patient ratio** drops hospital **mortality** rate  
  
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A study led by the University of Southampton and King's College London has shown that a higher registered **nurse** to **patient ratio** is linked to reduced risk of inpatient **death.**

The study of **staffing** levels in NHS hospitals, published in the online journal BMJ Open, found that in trusts where registered **nurses** had six or fewer **patients** to care for, the **death** rate for **patients**with medical conditions was 20 per cent lower than in those where they had more than 10.

Jane Ball, Principal Research Fellow NIHR CLAHRC (Wessex), said, "When determining the safety of**nurse** **staffing** on hospital wards, the level of registered **nurse** **staffing** is crucial; hospitals with higher levels of healthcare support workers have higher **mortality** rates."

Hospitals with more **doctors** per bed also had lower **death** rates but hospitals with more unregistered nursing support workers may have had higher **death** rates.

The study analysed two measures over two years,the number of beds per registered **nurse**, **doctor,**and healthcare support worker in 137 acute care trusts; and the number of **patients** per ward**nurse**, drawn from a survey of just under 3,000 registered **nurses** in a nationally representative sample of 31 of these trusts.

Age, emergency admissions and many other critically influential factors were also taken into account.**Deaths** for medical and surgical inpatients were also taken into account.

This is an observational study, so no firm conclusions can be drawn about cause and effect, added to which the findings on **nurse** to **patient ratios** are based on only 31 trusts.Previous research suggests that the **nurse** to **patient ratio** has an association with outcomes such as **mortality**, but few studies have taken account of the impact of other members of clinical staff.

Professor Peter Griffiths, Chair of Health Services Research at the University of Southampton, NIHR CLAHRC (Wessex), comments, "This does not, in itself, provide a robust basis to identify safe **staffing**thresholds but given the overall strength of evidence for an association, we are showing that, in England, the registered nursing workforce is clearly associated with **patient** safety. We found no evidence that having more support workers is associated with reduced **death** rates in hospital. Some of our findings suggest the opposite. A policy of replacing registered **nurses** with support staff may threaten **patient** safety."

The study was published in the British Medical Journal.

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