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More **patients** die in wards with fewer **nurses**;   
HEALTH  
  
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**Death** rates are higher on wards with fewer **nurses**, according to research that suggests the drive to replace them with lessqualified staff should be reviewed. Experts studied 137 acute hospital trusts in England and found lower **death** rates when there were more **nurses** working. Of the 31 trusts where the team knew the exact **staffing ratio,** researchers found that those with an average of six**patients** or fewer per registered **nurse** had 20 per cent lower **death** rates compared with trusts with more than 10 **patients** per **nurse**.

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

The 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."

Janet Davies, the chief executive of the Royal College of Nursing, said: "The evidence is a clear warning about the impact on **patient** care if we are to have too few registered **nurses** or are substituting them for healthcare support workers. [They] are highly valuable staff but they need to complement the registered nursing workforce - not replace it."

Public still backs strikes Public support for junior **doctors** remains strong, according to a new Ipsos Mori poll that found 66 per cent of people back strike action that excludes emergency care.

The poll, for the Health Service Journal, also found 64 per cent think the Government is more to blame for prolonging the dispute than junior **doctors.**

"Interestingly, those who support the strike are more likely to talk about the long and unsociable hours worked by **doctors** rather than pay, which is mentioned as much by those who oppose the strike as support it," said Anna Quigley, Head of health research at Ipsos Mori.

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