**'RISKY EXPERIMENT'**

**Replacing nurses with less-qualified assistants ‘is putting patients’ lives at risk’**

**BY SHAUN WOOLLER**

15th November 2016, 11:42 pm

Patients are a fifth more likely to die in hospitals where nurses are replaced by less-qualified nursing assistants, new research has shown

**PATIENTS are a fifth more likely to die in hospitals where nurses are replaced by less-qualified staff, research suggests.**

A study found patients got poorer care when the proportion of qualified nurses is diluted with less skilled nursing assistants.

A leading researcher warned the Government’s new policy of bringing in nursing associates to do some of the work of registered nurses was a “risky experiment”.

Ministers have announced 2,000 nursing associate roles across England, with the first 1,000 due to start training at 11 test sites from next month.

They will learn to take on some of the jobs of nurses, including administering controlled drugs and carrying out invasive procedures.

But the new research warns that diluting the skills mix – especially in England, which already has one of the lowest ratios of qualified nurses to other staff – puts lives at risk.

The research included data from 32 NHS hospital trusts in England, as well as hospitals in five European countries.

Professor Peter Griffiths, who worked on the study at Southampton University, said it showed the nursing associate plan was a “risky experiment”.

He said: “This is really important because in the NHS, for quite a long time, we’ve struggled to recruit enough NHS nurses, but we’ve consistently trained fewer than we need.

While the NHS claimed the new nursing staff were simply an addition to, and not a replacement for, nurses

“Policy has proceeded with the view that we could put other roles into the workforce to make up the shortfall.

“But this study – and other studies of this type – consistently raise questions about whether this is the case.

“Fewer registered nurses in the workforce – and more reliance on lesser qualified staff – is associated with an increased risk of death.

“I think this certainly shows that what’s currently being proposed needs to be regarded as a risky experiment and needs to be closely evaluated for the impact on patient outcomes.”

Mum donates 17,500 ounces of breast milk to child's hospital following death of her son

A Department of Health spokesman said: “NHS staff are our greatest asset, and our plans will see 1,000 nursing associates complement, not replace, existing fully-qualified registered nurses and nursing care support workers.

“This will ensure that nurses can make the best use of their time in providing outstanding patient care.

“Specifically, these findings are based on research conducted between 2009/10 - which has no proper comparison with our new nursing associate role.

“Patient safety in the NHS has come a long way since then.”