Hospital SHOCK: Having an older doctor linked to higher death rates

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HOSPITAL care should be the same for all patients, but concerning new research suggests the age of your doctor can impact on this.

A new study has found being treated in hospital by an older [doctor](http://www.express.co.uk/comment/expresscomment/789888/NHS-foreign-doctors-medical-school-immigration) can raise your mortality risk.

Research published in The British Medical Journal discovered patients treated in US hospitals by older doctors have [higher mortality rates](http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/790269/foreign-doctors-more-likely-investigated-incompetence-than-british-trained-medics) than those cared for by younger physicians.

The findings suggest that for every 77 patients treated by a doctor over 60, one fewer patient would die within 30 days of being admitted if the had been seen by someone under 40.

Researchers suggest that while older doctors should have increased clinical experience and knowledge, their skills may become outdated as scientific knowledge, technology and clinical guidelines change.

**The researchers stress that findings should be considered exploratory, and that no firm conclusions should be drawn yet.**

They discovered across a 30-day period that patients’ mortality rate was 10.8 per cent for physicians aged less than 40, 11.1 per cent for physicians aged 40 to 49, 11.3 per cent for physicians aged 50 to 59, and 12.1 per cent for physicians aged 60 or over.

However, they also found that doctors - of any age - who treated high numbers of patients seemed to have a “protective” effect on their skills.

While readmissions did not vary with age, the costs of care were slightly higher among older doctors.

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But the study authors conclude that: “Within the same hospital, patients treated by older physicians had higher mortality than patients cared for by younger physicians, except those physicians treating high volumes of patient volumes.”

Up until now, the difference in care quality between younger and older doctors had been unknown.

The team from Harvard T H Chan School of Public Health looked at a random sample of 736,537 patients who were 65 years and over, managed by 8,854 hospital doctors between 2011 to 2014.

Previous research has found that the gender of your doctor may make a difference too.

A 2016 study by Harvard University discovered that elderly patients were less likely to be readmitted to hospital within 30 days, or die, if they were treated by female doctors rather than male.

The researchers didn’t suggest a reason why this was, but previous studies found that women, compared to men, tended to spend more time with patients, communicate with them better and stick to clinical guidelines more often.

They discovered, when treated by female doctors, patients had a four per cent lower risk of dying prematurely, and a five per cent reduced likelihood of being readmitted to hospital within a month.

Examining more than one million patients, they found that if male doctors had the same outcomes as their female counterparts, annual deaths would drop by 32,000.