**Older doctors linked to higher death rates among patients, study finds**

* [Lucy Pasha-Robinson](http://www.independent.co.uk/author/lucy-pasha-robinson)
* [@lucypasha](https://twitter.com/lucypasha)
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Researchers unclear whether results point to differences in quality of care or whether physicians’ skills become outdated as medical practices evolve

Patients treated by older [doctors](http://www.independent.co.uk/topic/doctors) have higher death rates than those cared for by younger physicians, new research has shown.

The study, published by the British Medical Journal (BMJ), suggested fewer patients would die within 30 days of admission to US hospitals if treated by doctors under 40, instead of physicians aged 60 or over.

However, researchers stressed the findings should be regarded as exploratory only and further research was required.

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Researchers, led by YusukeTsugawa at Harvard T H Chan School of Public Health in Boston, looked at 736,537 elderly Medicare patients from 2011 to 2014 under the care of 18,854 US hospital physicians.

They analysed their records for 30-day mortality, readmissions and costs of care, and found – if the results are causal – that for every 77 patients treated by doctors over 60, one less patient would die within 30 days of admission if treated by a doctor under the age of 40.

The study found patients' 30-day mortality rates were 10.8 per cent for physicians aged less than 40, 11.1 per cent for doctors aged between 40 and 49, 11.3 per cent for physicians aged between 50 and 59, and 12.1 per cent for doctors aged 60 or over.

However researchers found physicians with a high volume of patients broke the trend and did not have higher patient mortality rates, suggesting high volumes could be “protective” of clinical skills.

In 2014, there were 24,023 licenced doctors aged over 50 working in the UK, according to the [General Medical Council](http://www.gmc-uk.org/Chapter_1_SOMEP_2015.pdf_63501394.pdf) – compared to 18,437 under 40 and 17,819 aged 40 to 49.