

# Low Intensive Care Unit staffing levels affect patient survival

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Patients in Intensive Care have a better chance of survival if there are more doctors and nurses working on the unit, new research shows.

The study, led by the University of Greenwich, also shows that the survival of the most severely ill [patients](#) is most affected when there are insufficient [nurses](#).

Researchers have been able to separate out staffing levels from other factors, such as workload and how ill patients are, for the first time after examining nearly 40,000 [patient records](#) and data from 65 ICUs in the UK.

Professor Elizabeth West, who led the research, says: "This is timely because the public are concerned about the ability of the NHS to provide safe and compassionate care. Recent catastrophic failures such as events at Mid-Staffordshire have highlighted the importance of staffing levels to patient survival, and this study has reinforced that message."

This is the first study of patient survival in ICUs to look at the numbers of doctors as well as nurses. Professor West says that doctors and nurses work closely together and function as a team on ICUs more than on other wards: "Future studies need to see the whole picture and examine how the multi-disciplinary team works together." It is also the first study to show that there is a sub-group of patients – those who are the most severely ill – who are most affected by low levels of [nurse staffing](#).

She believes the new evidence will be essential to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) when it draws up guidance on safe staffing levels later this year.

Provided by University of Greenwich

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