

Keeping nurses happy in their jobs helps retain doctors, study finds

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Hospitals that boost nursing staff engagement also find they improve the retention rate for senior doctors, according to a new study from the University of Surrey.

In researching the best ways for hospitals to retain nurses, the Surrey team discovered that a 10% increase in nurses' engagement—as determined by the NHS Staff Survey results—accounted for a 1% increase in nursing staff [retention](#) and an 8% decrease in nursing staff leaving the NHS for good.

Dr. Giuseppe Moscelli, Reader in Economics at the University of Surrey and Principal Investigator of the project, funded by The Health Foundation, said:

"Staff retention in the NHS is a significant challenge for the sector. Overall, the evidence gathered suggests that [policy-makers](#) within the NHS and [private sector](#) should focus on improving engagement and retention of nurses in the first instance. This is particularly relevant where nurses represent the majority of the [hospital](#) workforce. Our findings show that an increase in engagement not only positively impacts nurses' retention, but it also has an indirect but positive effect on the retention of doctors and other staff."

Over a 12-month period, the study found a 10% increase in the nurses' stability index—an official NHS workforce statistic that measures the proportion of retained nurses in an organization. This increase for nurses contributes to a 1.6% increase to the proportion of senior doctors that decide to stay at a hospital and to a 2.6% decrease to the proportion of senior doctors leaving the NHS for good. However, the Surrey team found that a change in doctors' retention data does not affect nurses. The team believe that an explanation for this could be that senior doctors are dependent on nurses to perform their job at a high level.

Dr. Melisa Sayli, co-author of the study and Postdoctoral Research Fellow from the University of Surrey, commented:

"The percentage changes in retention rates identified in our study may

seem small but set against the scale of the shortfall in NHS clinical [staff](#) currently, the size of the workforce and the cost and time involved in training doctors and nurses, means the impact of these changes is significant. Our study confirms the importance engagement plays in retaining nurses because, unlike doctors, they don't have a clear pathway to structured development opportunities after they have qualified.

"Simply put, when [nurses](#) feel valued and listened to, they stay."

The study, which is an IZA working paper, investigated 11 years of data from acute and mental health care hospital Trusts in the NHS, including NHS Staff Survey results and NHS hospital Trusts staffing records.

According to the World Health Organization, there will be a shortfall of 18 million healthcare workers by 2030. Furthermore, figures from NHS Digital found that there were more than 38,000 vacant nursing positions as the NHS prepared for winter 2021.

More information: IZA DP No. 15126: Staff Engagement, Job Complementarity and Labour Supply: Evidence from the English NHS Hospital Workforce: www.iza.org/publications/dp/15126 ... s-hospital-workforce

Provided by University of Surrey

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