

Right Numbers = Right Care

updated 2009

Get it Right - RIGHT NUMBERS

The right number of registered nurses means the right care for patients. There is an extensive evidence base on the links between low staffing levels in nursing and a range of negative care outcomes including increased hospital-related mortality, hospital-acquired pneumonia, unplanned extubation, failure to rescue, nosocomial bloodstream infections, and length of stay.

In 2006 Professor Anne Rafferty published a major study in patient-nursing ratios. This mirrored the findings of US research by establishing a direct link between the number of nurses working on wards and patients' chances of recovery and survival. She found that wards with lower nurse to patient ratios had a **26%** higher patient mortality rate. Prof Rafferty's research endorsed a 2004 review by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine of the impact of registered nurses on patient outcomes. The review concluded that a higher proportion and number of registered nurses in the nursing workforce help reduce patient mortality, infection rates, patient falls, the incidence of pressure sores and mistakes administering medication.

More recently in 2009 Dr Foster Intelligence published research showing lower mortality rates and shorter hospital stays in acute Trusts that had more nurses per bed.

The right number of registered nurses means the right care for patients but it also results in considerable financial savings for the NHS and therefore the Government and the taxpayer. Recent US research quantified benefits per additional nurse at \$60,000 with an additional \$10,300 for reduced patient mortality, and \$1800 from faster recovery.

Unfortunately poor NHS staffing information in Wales means that it is very difficult to monitor nurse staffing levels. RCN Wales believes that Local health Boards should provide quarterly information demonstrating the ratio of registered nurses to beds and the ratio of registered nurses to healthcare support workers. This information is one indicator of patient safety and quality of care. RCN research shows that **47%** of nurses in Wales believe there are not sufficient staff on their ward to provide a good standard of care. On average each nurse works 6 hours overtime a week.

The RCN believes that a statutory responsibility should be laid on NHS health organisations in Wales who directly provide patients services to establish a staffing system that provides the right number of registered nurses to ensure appropriate staffing levels for patient care. Rather than establishing a specific numeric ratio, the legislation would require organisations to ensure that in setting their staffing levels they would not only take into account the number of patients, but also look at the experience level of nurses on the unit, the skill-mix of staff, the severity of patients' conditions and the availability of support services. Staff would also be involved in determining the staffing levels set for their working environment to ensure that their professional judgement is central to the decision making process.

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KEY POLICY ACTIONS

- The RCN believes that a statutory responsibility should be laid on NHS health organisations in Wales who directly provide patients services to establish a staffing system that provides the right number of registered nurses to ensure appropriate staffing levels for patient care.
- RCN Wales believes that Local Health Boards should provide quarterly information demonstrating the ratio of registered nurses to beds and the ratio of registered nurses to healthcare support workers.
- The RCN believes that the number of excess hours nurses are working should be monitored and targets should be established to reduce these. The working of unpaid and unrecognised excess hours should be stopped immediately.