

Evidence Bites: Staffing pressure

An evidence summary inspired by safety discussions held at the WUTH Safety Summit

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Why is staffing pressure a patient safety concern?

Ensuring NHS providers are staffed with the appropriate number and mix of clinical professionals is vital to the delivery of quality care and in keeping patients safe from avoidable harm¹. Pressure on staffing may have implications for patient safety incidents relating to human factors and interruptions / distractions in the clinical environment.

New publication: The risks to care quality and staff wellbeing of an NHS system under pressure

A report commissioned by The King's Fund in Jan 2018 summarises the research evidence on the direct and indirect impact of staff health, wellbeing and engagement on patient care².

The findings of the report are:

- Staff experience was associated with sickness absence rates, spend on agency staff and staffing levels, indicating that staff wellbeing is impacted negatively by a workforce that is overstretched and supplemented by temporary staff. Patient experience was also negatively associated with workforce factors: higher spend on agency staff, fewer doctors and especially fewer nurses per bed, and bed occupancy.
- Use of agency staff provides less continuity and stability of care, and inadequate staffing and high bed occupancy will impact negatively on the quality of inpatient care. That these associations with workforce factors come through in patients' feedback is noteworthy, as it signals the risks to the quality of care for patients given the current widely-reported crises in NHS staffing. Staff-reported experience was correlated with patient feedback in several areas, notably between staff perceptions of care quality and patient experience, indicating that staff and patients' perceptions about quality of care are consistent.

The authors make the following recommendations:

“Our findings highlight the importance of reducing dependency on agency staff, not just as a cost-cutting measure, but also from a quality of care perspective. Likewise, patients' feedback shows the importance of reducing the pressure on beds and ensuring adequate staffing for improving quality of patient care. Associations between workforce factors, bed availability, staff and patient experience resonate with other research. They suggest that the deepening crisis in NHS staffing and availability of beds could cause a deterioration in the quality of care. The findings have significance for policy makers and managers in terms of the urgent need to address the workforce and NHS capacity issues.”

More reading

1. [NHS England: Safe staffing](#)
2. [The risks to care quality and staff wellbeing of an NHS system under pressure](#), Picker Institute, 31 January 2018

For more details or to request an electronic copy of the below, or if you'd like an Evidence Bite on another topic, please contact the Library & Knowledge Service at wuth.lks@nhs.net or ext. 8610.