

Warning on ward deaths

Wards with more nurses have lower death rates but boosting numbers of less qualified staff may have the opposite effect, according to a study.

Death rates in wards where the ratio of patients to nurses was lower than six to one were 20 per cent lower than in wards where the ratio was higher than ten to one. However, hospitals with high numbers of support workers, such as healthcare assistants and auxiliary nurses, had higher death rates.

The researchers, from King's College London and the University of Southampton, said that their findings should be a warning for NHS bosses against "current policies geared towards substituting healthcare support workers for registered nurses". Jane Ball, principal research fellow, added that on average healthcare assistants in England had less than two weeks' training.

Another study, in *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, found that a drop in the number of nurses caring for sick newborns was leading to higher death rates.

Times 10-2-16