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Patients 'paying price' as study warns of nurse burdens

By **Laura Donnelly** HEALTH EDITOR

PATIENTS are 14 per cent more likely to die on wards where nurses are burdened with just two extra patients above the average of eight, a study has warned.

Research by Southampton University found far higher death risks in understaffed hospitals. The average

hospital has around eight patients per nurse, but some have to cope with as many as 18 patients at a time. The research, involving 31 NHS trusts, found that every extra patient on a nurse's caseload increased mortality rates by 7 per cent.

It found that short staffing meant that crucial tasks, such as administering medicines and detecting that pa-

tients were deteriorating, went undone. The study follows repeated warnings of shortages of nurses, with 40,000 vacancies and fewer nurses coming to work in the UK from elsewhere in Europe since the vote on Brexit.

Janet Davies, chief executive of the Royal College of Nursing, said: "Despite years of warnings, hospitals across the country do not have enough

nurses. This research puts beyond doubt that patients pay the very highest price when the Government permits nursing on the cheap."

The research, published in the *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, shows that when registered nursing levels are lower, necessary care is more likely to be missed.

Each 10 per cent increase in the

amount of care left undone was associated with a 16 per cent increase in the likelihood of a patient dying following common surgery, the study found.

Professor Peter Griffiths, chairman of health services research at the University of Southampton, said: "This study reinforces the importance of registered nurses who are trained to a degree level."