International study highlights nursing workforce issues in England

Results of the international RN4CAST study into links between nursing workforce issues and patient outcomes in 13 countries have been published in the British Medical Journal today.

The study of nurses in England, which was led by researchers at the National Nursing Research Unit (NNRU) at King’s College London and the University of Southampton, reveals that the levels of “burnout” and job dissatisfaction experienced by English nurses are some of the worst in Europe.

The worldwide study was led by the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing in the U.S. and the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium in Europe. Researchers in England surveyed over 2,900 nurses based at over 40 hospitals across the country and results have been compared with similar samples from 11 other European countries and from the USA. 42% of English nurses surveyed were assessed as being burnt out, second only to Greece, while 44% stated that they intended to leave their job in the next year due to dissatisfaction.

Anne Marie Rafferty, Professor of Nursing Policy at King’s College London, say: “Our study reveals huge variation, both between hospitals and within hospitals, on core workforce issues such as nurse to patient ratios. It is also clear that England’s nurses are working in highly pressurised environments, resulting in lower levels of job satisfaction and greater “burnout” compared to some other European health economies. We now need to analyse this variation in greater depth to assess - are the different staffing levels we found a reflection of different needs, which are being met equally well? Or are they associated with a different level of care provision between and within hospitals?”

The RN4CAST survey asked nurses across Europe and the USA to rate their satisfaction with different aspects of their job, including levels of support, working environment, and whether or not they would recommend their hospital to friends and family.

Linda H. Aiken, PhD, RN, a Professor of Nursing and Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, and one of the study’s lead authors comments: “Patients in European and U.S. hospitals with better work environments were more likely to rate their hospital highly and to recommend their hospital to others. In contrast, patient safety
is a concern in hospitals that have poor work environments and insufficient nurse staffing”

Professor Peter Griffiths, Chair of Health Services Research at the University of Southampton adds: "This study shows that widely reported problems in the quality of nursing are not just a matter of the poor attitudes of some nurses, the working environment also plays an important role and hospital management needs to take these matters seriously. There is a clear link between nurse staffing levels and job satisfaction and their views on overall outcomes for patients. We are now analysing hospital data on death rates and rates of complications to see if high patient to staff ratios impact on these outcomes.”

Jane Ball, Deputy Director of the National Nursing Research Unit at King’s College London, said: “This international study reveals that the same workforce issues are affecting health systems across Europe and the USA. We need to learn from the best performing countries to improve the working environments and support available for our nurses. Otherwise, with high levels of job dissatisfaction and nearly half the nurses we surveyed stating that they are intending to leave their job within the year, we could face substantial nurse shortages in England in the future.”

Martin McKee, Professor of European Health at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, said: "These alarming findings must be a major cause of concern for the government as it embarks on a radical change to how we provide health care that is so dependent on the commitment, goodwill and professionalism of those who deliver front line care."

The study, conducted with a 3 million Euro grant from the European Commission, with additional funding from the National Institute of Nursing Research of the National Institutes of Health in the U.S., investigated hospital quality and safety of care in Belgium, England, Finland, Ireland, Germany, Greece, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the U.S.

Contact information for country lead researchers can be found on www.rn4cast.eu. The full article can be found at http://www.bmj.com/content/344/bmj.e1717

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Notes to editors:

1. A copy of the paper is available from Becky Attwood upon request.

2. The National Nursing Research Unit (NNRU) at King’s College, London undertakes high quality empirical research and reviews to inform policy and practice relevant to the nursing workforce. We aim to produce world class health services research that is of relevance to policymakers and healthcare leaders and which contributes to improving the quality and effectiveness of nursing in its social, political, local, national and global contexts. For more information go to [http://www.kcl.ac.uk/nursing/research/nnru/index.aspx](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/nursing/research/nnru/index.aspx)

3. Florence Nightingale School of Nursing & Midwifery at King’s College London is the world’s first professional School of nursing established by Florence Nightingale.

The number one Nursing and Midwifery School in London and highly regarded by leading London NHS Trusts with links to industry, health services and policy makers, the School develops leading-edge nurses and midwives of tomorrow – practitioners, partners, and leaders in their field.

The School has over 1,000 full-time students training to be nurses and midwives plus an extensive portfolio of undergraduate and postgraduate activities to meet the needs of a wide range of healthcare professionals seeking continuing professional development. The School is at the forefront of health services, policy and evaluation research and home to the influential National Nursing Research Unit (NNRU). For further information visit: [www.kcl.ac.uk/nursing](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/nursing)

4. King’s College London is one of the top 30 universities in the world (2011/12 QS international world rankings), and was The Sunday Times 'University of the Year 2010/11', and the fourth oldest in England. A research-led university based in the heart of London, King’s has nearly 23,500 students (of whom more than 9,000 are graduate students) from nearly 140 countries, and some 6,000 employees. King’s is in the second phase of a £1 billion redevelopment programme which is transforming its estate.

King’s has an outstanding reputation for providing world-class teaching and
cutting-edge research. In the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise for British universities, 23 departments were ranked in the top quartile of British universities; over half of our academic staff work in departments that are in the top 10 per cent in the UK in their field and can thus be classed as world leading. The College is in the top seven UK universities for research earnings and has an overall annual income of nearly £450 million.

King’s has a particularly distinguished reputation in the humanities, law, the sciences (including a wide range of health areas such as psychiatry, medicine, nursing and dentistry) and social sciences including international affairs. It has played a major role in many of the advances that have shaped modern life, such as the discovery of the structure of DNA and research that led to the development of radio, television, mobile phones and radar. It is the largest centre for the education of healthcare professionals in Europe; no university has more Medical Research Council Centres.

King’s College London and Guy’s and St Thomas’, King’s College Hospital and South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trusts are part of King’s Health Partners. King’s Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre (AHSC) is a pioneering global collaboration between one of the world’s leading research-led universities and three of London’s most successful NHS Foundation Trusts, including leading teaching hospitals and comprehensive mental health services. For more information, visit: www.kingshealthpartners.org

The College is in the midst of a five-year, £500 million fundraising campaign – World questions | King’s answers – created to address some of the most pressing challenges facing humanity as quickly as feasible. The campaign’s three priority areas are neuroscience and mental health, leadership and society, and cancer. More information about the campaign is available at www.kcl.ac.uk/kingsanswers

5. **University of Southampton** is a leading UK teaching and research institution with a global reputation for leading-edge research and scholarship across a wide range of subjects in engineering, science, social sciences, health and humanities.

With over 23,000 students, around 5000 staff, and an annual turnover well in excess of £435 million, the University of Southampton is acknowledged as one of the country’s top institutions for engineering, computer science and medicine. We combine academic excellence with an innovative and entrepreneurial approach to research, supporting a culture that engages and challenges students and staff in their pursuit of learning.

The University is also home to a number of world-leading research centres including the Institute of Sound and Vibration Research, the centre for innovation and leadership in Health Sciences, the Optoelectronics Research Centre, the Web Science Trust and Doctoral training Centre, the Centre for the Developmental Origins of Health and Disease, the Southampton Statistical Sciences Research Institute and is a partner of the National Oceanography Centre at the Southampton waterfront campus.
6. The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine is a world-leading centre for research and postgraduate education in public and global health, with 4000 students and more than 1300 staff working in over 100 countries. The School is one of the highest-rated research institutions in the UK, and was recently cited as one of the world’s top universities for collaborative research. The School's mission is to improve health and health equity in the UK and worldwide; working in partnership to achieve excellence in public and global health research, education and translation of knowledge into policy and practice. [www.lshtm.ac.uk](http://www.lshtm.ac.uk)