

# More cancer specialist nurses to improve hospital care

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Patients battling cancer have a better experience of care at hospitals that employ more cancer specialist nurses.

Research from the University of Southampton, shows that patients of better staffed hospitals are more likely to report being given more [emotional support](#) by nurses who work well together on wards.

Study author Peter Griffiths, Professor of Health Services Research at the University of Southampton, comments: "Cancer and its treatment can place a huge burden, both physical and psychological, on patients. Supporting people with cancer on the journey from diagnosis to treatment and beyond, which for increasing numbers includes long term survival, is a key challenge for [health services](#). Specialist nurses have been identified as having a key role in providing support and the number employed by the NHS has increased in recent decades, however with the strain on NHS funding there is no guarantee about the future of those posts.

"This is the first direct evidence that a widespread policy of employing more specialist nurses is linked to measurable benefits to patients. The absolute differences we see are small but if your odds of receiving good emotional support are increased by 15% I suspect most of us would take it if we were being treated for cancer."

The study, published today (6 June 2103) in the *Journal of Health Services Research and Policy*, reviewed existing data from the 2010

National [Cancer Patient](#) Experience Survey.

Analysis showed small but important differences in experiences of care. Patients of better staffed trusts were more likely to report that people treating and caring for them worked well together and they received enough emotional support during outpatient treatment. Women receiving chemotherapy for [breast cancer](#) were also 34% more likely to report that hospital staff do everything possible to control the side effects of chemotherapy in trusts with the most clinical nurse specialists.

Professor Griffiths adds: "The message from patients on this has been clear for some time – many of them value the support of specialist nurses. But in these difficult times many trusts are looking to save money and evidence that clearly links the employment of specialist nurses to better patient experience is important. Trusts should realise that if these posts are cut patient experience can suffer."

Alison Richardson, co-author of the study and Professor of Cancer Nursing and End of Life Care at Southampton General Hospital and the University of Southampton, says: "This research is important for hospitals as it demonstrates variability in Cancer Nurse Specialist provision across different sites and that specific cancer multidisciplinary teams can have an impact on the quality of cancer patient experience. They need to be aware that any decision to reduce the number of these types of nurses could have a detrimental effect on patients."

Macmillan Cancer Support has been committed to establishing and providing cancer nurse specialist roles throughout the NHS. Ciarán Devane, Chief Executive, Macmillan Cancer Support comments: "This research backs up the wealth of evidence showing just how important cancer nurse specialists are, especially for improving cancer [patient experience](#)."

"Sadly access to these nurses varies across the country and by cancer type, while the number of people with cancer is increasing. It is essential that cancer nurse specialist roles are protected and every effort is made for more [cancer](#) patients to have access to one."

Provided by University of Southampton

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