

96 per cent of hospitals have nurse shortages, official figures show

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Almost every hospital in the UK is dangerously short of nurses, according to analysis of official NHS data.

Staff said patients were being left unwashed, unmonitored and without crucial medications, amid a [worsening crisis in the country's hospitals](#).

The figures show 96 per cent of acute hospitals failed to provide the planned number of registered nurses to cover day shifts in October - the worst performance since analysis began in 2014.

It comes as [hospitals struggle](#) to cope with rising cases of flu, and norovirus levels which are 75 per cent higher than last year.

More than four in ten NHS trusts have declared a major alert this month, amid warnings of the worst winter pressures in history.

Nurses said they were working in “[desperately unsafe](#)” circumstances, with one saying she felt “sick to the stomach” at the risks being posed.

The number of days patients are spending in hospitals due to so-called 'bed blocking' has risen 42 per cent

The analysis by Health Service Journal tracked NHS data from 2014/15 to 2016/17.

In total, 214 of 224 acute hospitals failed to fully fill their day shifts last October - a rate of 96 per cent - while while 190 (85 per cent) were understaffed at night. Both figures are the worst since tracking began in 2014.

Nurses said they were being reduced to tears regularly, with one describing an “overwhelming feeling of sadness” at failing to deliver the care patients deserved.

"It's the toughest I have ever seen it" Ruth May, executive director, NHS Improvement

One working in the south west of England said: "The most patients I have ever had is 16 on a night shift, I know for a fact that I did not do all the observations and can only hope that I did not cause anyone any real harm."

Another said: "Corners are cut and safety is compromised daily, we just do a really good job of covering it up".

An incident report disclosed one nurse left looking after 24 patients during 2015. The short-staffing left patients without care and medication, as unhappy relatives pleaded for help.

NHS England has warned the health system is under strain

One of England's most senior nurses said the pressures the NHS was under were the worst she had ever experienced.

Ruth May, executive director at NHS Improvement - the health service watchdog - said: "We all know the NHS is dealing with intense pressure at the moment. It's the toughest I have ever seen it."

Janet Davies, chief executive of the Royal College of Nursing, said: "This is yet more evidence that there are too few nurses caring for patients, putting people at serious risk.

"There are already at least 24,000 nursing vacancies in the UK and it's getting worse every single day."

The new figures also suggest healthcare assistants are routinely being employed to stand in for nurses.

Research published in November found that patients are a fifth more likely to die in hospitals where nurses are replaced with less-qualified staff.

A Department of Health spokesman said: "We expect all parts of the NHS to make sure they have the right staff, in the right place, at the right time to provide safe care — that's why there are already almost 26,000 extra clinical staff, including almost 11,400 additional doctors and over 11,200 additional nurses on our wards since May 2010."

The trusts with the lowest percentage of nursing shifts filled:

Dewsbury and District Hospital 75%

Pontefract General Infirmary 77%

Princess Alexandra Hospital, Harlow 77%

University Hospital of North Tees 77%

Royal Albert Edward infirmary, Wigan 79%

Figures from NHS Choices, October 2016, analysis by Health Service Journal