

Safe nurse staffing levels: the contribution of research evidence to policy development

Jane Ball

RCN Policy Adviser (September 2009 - March 2011)

**Deputy Director, National Nursing Research Unit (May 2011)
King's College London**

Safe nurse staffing levels: RCN guidance & policy



Policy objectives

- Why do staffing levels matter?
- How to plan nurse staffing levels?
- How to keep staffing levels safe?
- What are the impediments to ensuring safe staffing levels?

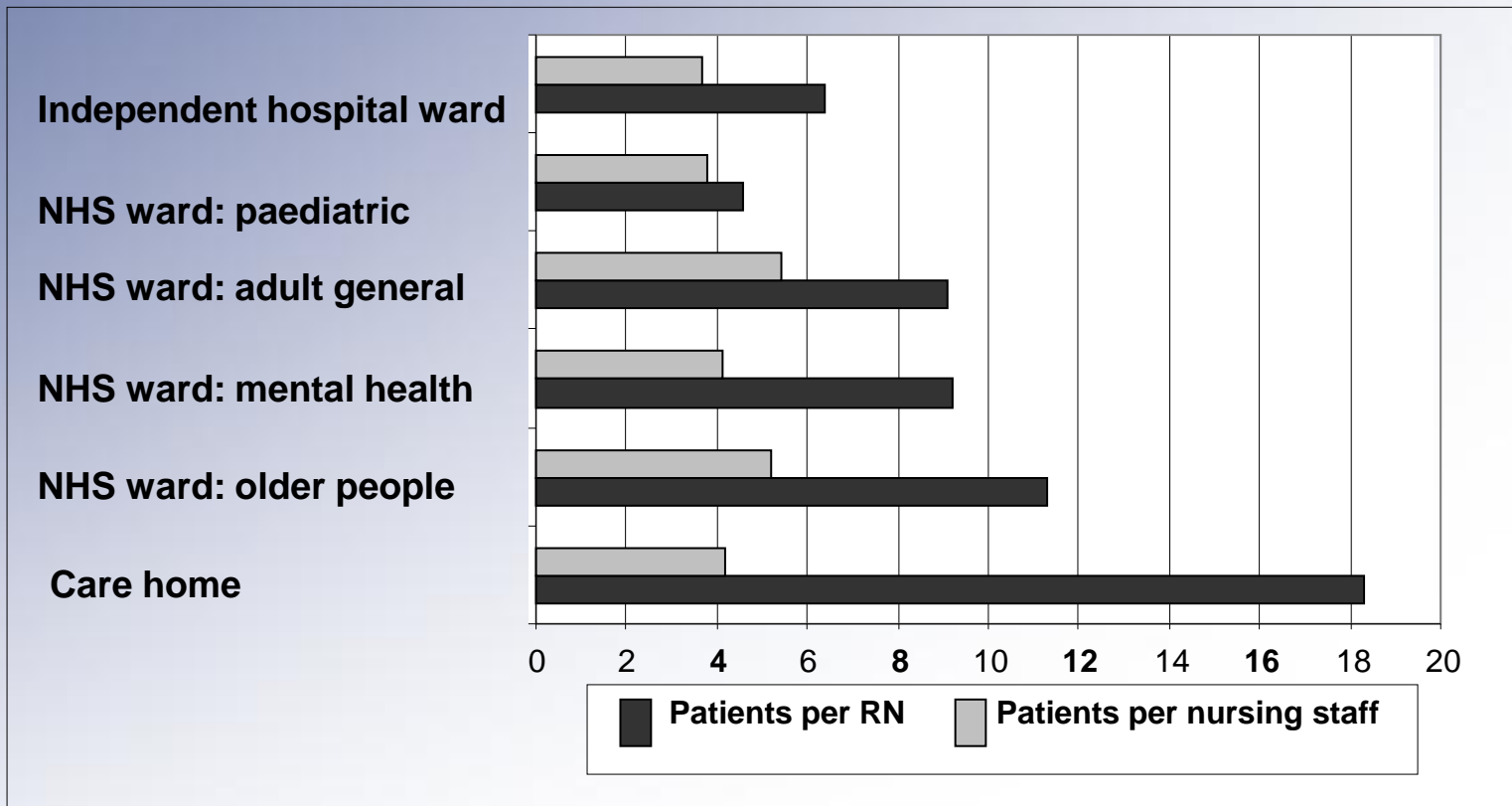
Staffing matters - evidence

- **Research studies....** (eg. Kane 2007)
- **Effects of insufficient staffing seen in high profile care crises...** (eg. Mid Staffs)
- **Efficiency/productivity message –** ‘avoidable complications’ only avoidable with sufficient nursing input....
- **Effects on patient AND staff outcomes –** (Magnet hospitals, Boorman)

Nursing workforce survey (Ball & Pike 2009)

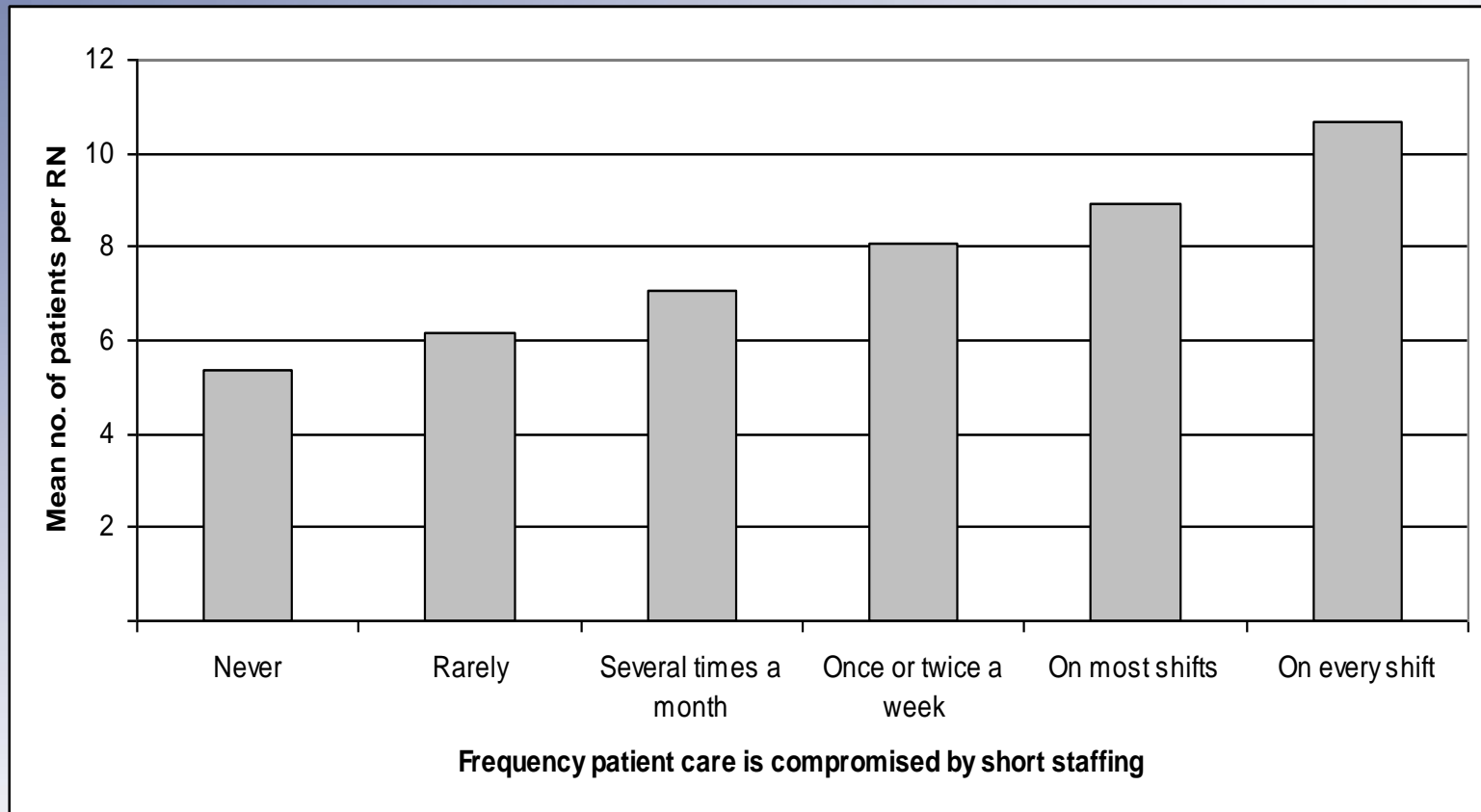
- Undertaken since 2000
- Survey of nurses (RCN members)
- Stratified random sample (9,000)
- Response rate - 54%
- Across UK

Number of patients per registered nurse/nursing staff by care setting



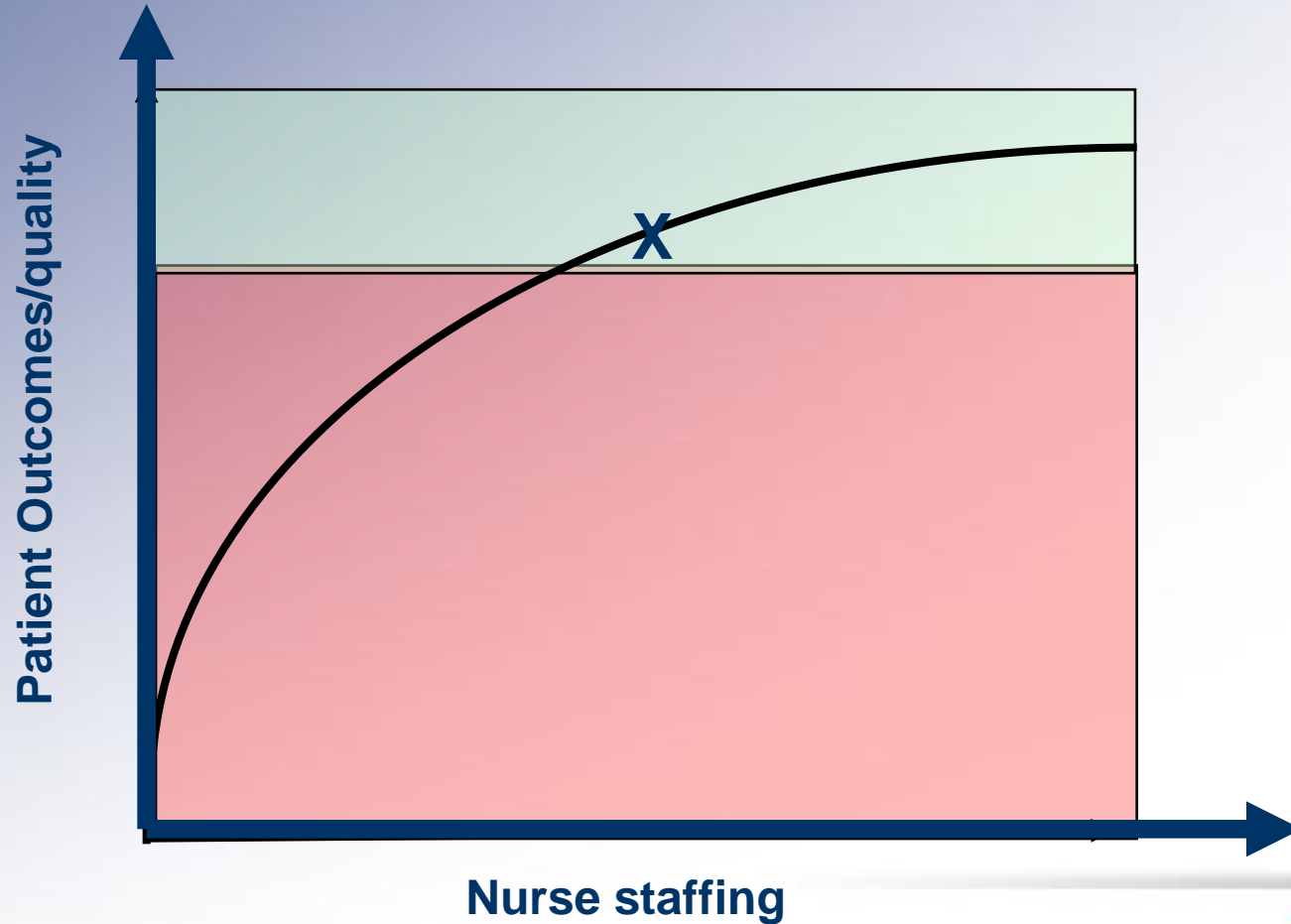
Source: *Employment Research /RCN 2009*

Frequency that 'Care is compromised by short staffing' by patients per RN (NHS hospital wards)



Source: *Employment Research/RCN 2009*

Optimal staffing



How to... determine safe staffing levels

Paper details approaches, strengths and weaknesses of specific tools

Establishment setting/staffing reviews

- a) Systematic/consistent using recognised approach/tools
- b) Triangulate
- c) Reviewed regularly (every 2-3 years)
- d) Followed best practice guidelines (staff involvement etc.)

What's needed...? Policy implications

Staffing metrics

- Planned establishment
- Staff in post (as % establishment)
- Skill mix (% RNs)
- Patient : Nurse ratios (per shift)
- Staff turnover
- Sickness absence
- Bank/agency use

Conclusion

- Make the case – why it matters
- Collate – power of repackaging
- Accessibility
- Spot the ‘killer findings’
- Gaps have big policy implications