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Single nurse left alone to care for 17 patients amid staffing crisis



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9

Damning report cites serious concerns of potential harm to patients because of unsafe staffing levels at Midlands hospital and warns NHS trust it must improve



Picture: Alamy

A single nurse was left in charge of 17 patients with complex needs on a ward at a hospital run by an NHS trust struggling with 'significant' nursing vacancies, a damning report says.

The [Care Quality Commission \(CQC\) report](#), published on 19 April, warned of potential harm to patients because of unsafe staffing levels at the Good Hope Hospital in Sutton Coldfield in the West Midlands. Nursing staff reported two patient falls on the same day due to a lack of staff, while on a separate occasion a nurse on another ward was left alone looking after 26 patients.

Many of the patients needed one-to-one care, which inspectors said staff were 'unable to provide'. Some medical staff reported they were concerned about the potential consequences of 'unsafe situations' for their professional registrations.

Most wards at the hospital were operating below national guidance for safe nurse staffing, says CQC

Nursing staff on one ward reported two falls on the same day because of a lack of one-to-one care, with one patient needing a CT scan of their head and 'neurological observations' as a result.

The CQC has served University Hospitals Birmingham Foundation Trust (UHBFT), which manages the Good Hope Hospital, with a warning notice to make 'timely improvements due to serious safety concerns'.

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Inspectors said most wards at the hospital were operating below the national guidance for safe nurse staffing levels when they visited over two days in December. The [RCN recommends one nurse should have a maximum of six patients](#) to maintain safety.

While staffing levels improved over the Christmas holiday period there were still several shifts where two or fewer qualified staff had been drafted in to work. The trust continues to face 'significant' vacancy rates, the CQC said.

Trust says it is working through CQC recommendations and staff vacancy rate has reduced

'This was well below the recommended safe staffing levels within wards and placed patients at risk of potential harm,' the report said.

'Information received after the inspection showed for December 2022 there was a vacancy rate of 78.06 whole time equivalents (WTE) across the medical services for qualified nurse staffing. There was an additional vacancy rate of 15.36 WTE for healthcare assistants.'

It said the hospital had plans for recruitment campaigns to improve staffing levels, but there was no time frame for how quickly this would address concerns.

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UHBFT chief executive Jonathan Brotherton said [the trust has begun working through the CQC's recommendations](#) and its staff vacancy rate has reduced from 13% to just over 10% since the inspection.

'Our staffing levels, like much of the NHS, are challenged and we are continually working to address this.'

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Visit the [IPF Resource Centre](#)

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Vol. 38 issue 4

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