

Press release

For immediate release

Thursday 28 April 2022

The Intensive Care Society Responds to the Passing of the Health and Care Bill by the Government

The Intensive Care Society is concerned that the Government has missed an opportunity to improve NHS workforce planning in rejecting an amendment to the Health and Care Bill (1). This amendment would have made it compulsory for the Government to publish regular, independent assessments of the number of intensive care professionals required by the NHS to deliver care for our patients.

The Society, along with over 100 other health and care organisations, joined the Strength in Numbers campaign launched by the Royal College of Physicians in 2021, urging MPs to vote for this essential change to the Health and Care Bill (2).

Passing this amendment to the Health and Care Bill, would have ensured workforce safety standards were met in the NHS. However, it would still have fallen short for intensive care and other specialties which are reliant on a diverse specialist multi-professional workforce in addition to doctors and nurses to provide optimal treatments.

The UK has one of the lowest proportions of intensive care beds per capita in Europe, around 7.3 beds per 100,000 population (3). The past two years of the pandemic has exposed this under-provision of ICU beds more than ever, resulting in cancellations of major elective surgery, transfers of critically ill patients to hospitals outside their region, and the use of make-shift ICUs (4).

Furthermore, and most importantly, intensive care staff and our wider NHS colleagues have been in relentless demand during the pandemic, which has not only exhausted our workforce but also had a huge psychological impact. Staffing issues are alarmingly prevalent and the impact of this is being felt throughout hospitals across the country. The way in which the healthcare system operated during the pandemic is not a sustainable or efficient way of working and immediate action must be taken to ensure we fix this existential crisis we currently face.

Intensive care staff and patients deserve a clear plan outlining how the NHS is going to enable us to recover from the pandemic, which has occurred against a background of chronic inadequate funding. We also need a sustainable and evidence-based workforce model to ensure we are able to provide high quality healthcare in the years to come. We urgently need the Government to address our workforce shortages and to provide the resources needed for us to care for the sickest patients.

The Intensive Care Society will continue to advocate for safe multi-professional staffing ratios for intensive care, as outlined in the Guidelines for the Provision of Intensive Care Services (5), as well as for an increase in the number of funded intensive care beds in the UK to address the currently increasing gap between capacity and demand for intensive care.

Without urgent action by the Government, including the establishment of a robust plan to address the staffing shortages and increase capacity inside hospitals, we face the continuation, and probable further deterioration, of the current healthcare crisis.

1. <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/news/rcp-responds-commons-consideration-lords-amendments-health-and-care-bill>
2. <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/guidelines-policy/strength-numbers-stronger-workforce-planning-health-and-care-bill>
3. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/e5a80353-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/e5a80353-en>
4. https://www.ics.ac.uk/Society/Policy_and_Communications/Articles/Recovery_and_Restitution_of_intensive_care
5. www.ics.ac.uk/gpics

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Notes to Editors

1. The [Intensive Care Society](#) was founded in 1970 and is the oldest and largest intensive care, membership organisation in the UK
2. For the over 50 years the Society has provided research, education, standards and guidelines and more to ensure our members have all the latest knowledge and tools to provide first class care to patients
3. The Intensive Care Society has over 3000 multi-professional members from across the world, made up of consultants, trainees, specialty doctors, nurses, allied health professionals (AHPs) and students
4. The Society is a registered charity and uses donations to award grants, enabling new research to be undertaken in order to improve critical care. The society coordinates 70% of UK critical care research
5. The Intensive Care Society's annual [State of the Art Congress](#) is the largest annual intensive care conference in Europe. The conference brings together both delegates and speakers from around the world
6. Twitter: [@ICS_updates](#)