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Shortage of ICU Beds Leads to Patient Deaths

A lacking supply of ICU beds is leading to preventable deaths, according to a study from France.

Dr. Rene Robert of Hopital Jean Bernard in Poitiers, France and colleagues found that out of 1,332 patients referred to ICUs in those hospitals over a three-month period, almost 15% were turned away, at least temporarily, because there were no beds available. They also concluded that those patients that got turned away often had a higher risk of dying than patients who got into the ICU right away.

Overall, 33% of patients who got turned away died within the next 60 days, versus 27% of patients admitted to the ICU immediately. Part of the problem is that there is also a shortage of regular ward beds in many hospitals, suggested the scientists.

The solution to the problem is not simple, but increased compliance with triage guidelines may help, especially when ICUs are full, said Dr. René Robert and his team.

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