Could changing the staffing model in the intensive care unit reduce patients’ risk of dying?

According to the Leapfrog Group for Patient Safety, ICUs staffed with intensivists (also known as critical care physicians) can reduce mortality by 40 percent. This practice also is endorsed by the National Quality Forum.

Intensivists are physicians who complete a residency in internal or pulmonary medicine, surgery or anesthesia, and a fellowship in critical care medicine. Among hospitals reporting that intensivists provide care, those with 300 or more beds are the most prevalent. But since 2007, hospitals with 100 to 199 beds showed the most growth in using intensivists. For all bed sizes, overall growth was 34.4 percent.

Intensivists have a variety of employment models; those providing care in general ICUs are most likely to be a hospital or independent provider group employee.

For more information on AHA data, contact the AHA Resource Center at rc@aha.org or 312-422-2050.