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6117 Monona Drive • Madison, WI 53716 • 608-221-0383 • Fax 608 221-2788  
Info@wisconsinnurses.org • www.wisconsinnurses.org

## Safe Nurse Staffing

Over the past decade, health care providers continue to implement measures to reduce the costs of health care. Given the fact that Registered Nurse salaries are typically the largest expense item within a health care organization's personnel budgets, this health care professional is frequently the target for reduction. These cost-cutting efforts often result in inadequate RN staffing levels, thus impacting quality and safe patient care outcomes. These changes are occurring at the same time when the health care industry is seeing increases in patient acuity, shortening of length of stay and increases in the complexity of technology. These factors are contributing to high levels of RN turnover with resulting recruitment and retention efforts.

There continues to be the release of research studies supporting the importance of having the RN as the direct care provider. Other research studies focus on supporting the importance of nurse staffing systems that demonstrate quality and safe patient care outcomes. Many variables, such as acuity of patients, level of experience of nursing staff, layout of the unit, or level of ancillary support, are keys to establishing the "right" nurse-patient ratio for any one unit or area. For this reason, the American Nurses Association developed the *Principles for Nurse Staffing* to best address the dynamic and challenging aspects to promoting safe nurse staffing 24 hours per day seven days a week. The *Principles for Nurse Staffing* recognizes that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to safe nurse staffing as called for in other staffing systems. This staffing strategy yields a safe nurse staffing system that includes provisions for the health care organization to have flexibility of tailoring nurse staffing daily, including shift-to-shift. The *Principles for Nurse Staffing* identifies the specific needs of patients based on factors that demonstrate how sick the patient is, the experience of the nursing staff, technology and support services available to the RN to deliver safe, high-quality cost-effective care.

### Solution

WNA is interested in supporting policies that address safe nurse staffing plans that demonstrate the following:

1. Support efforts to mandate the establishment of valid and reliable nurse staffing systems in all patient care settings beginning with acute care and to require standard, public reporting of nurse staffing levels and mix and patient outcomes.
2. Pursue legislative and regulatory strategies to maximize the safety and quality of patient care beginning with acute care that include the following:

- A. Require that hospitals establish a Nurse Staffing Plan that includes unit and shift specific staffing needs based on ANA's Principles for Nurse Staffing such as patient characteristics and total number of patients for whom care is being provided.
    1. The nurse staffing plan and related policies and procedures must be developed and maintained by a staffing committee under the direction of the chief nurse executive and whose membership includes an appropriate number of direct care nurses.
    2. The staffing plan must include an overtime policy that addresses both voluntary and mandatory overtime and the role of overtime in nurse fatigue.
    3. The staffing plan will be evaluated on an ongoing basis by collecting data measuring a delineated set of validated nursing-sensitive indicators.
    4. The staffing plan must be reviewed and evaluated at least biennially to determine whether the plan properly ensures appropriate care.
  - B. Establish care giver protections that include:
    1. Prohibiting the hospital / employer from taking retaliatory action (discharge, suspension, demotion, harassment, denial of employment or promotion, layoff of nursing staff or other adverse action) against a nurse who discloses a policy or practice of the hospital that the nurse believes violates law, rule or professional standards of practice that poses a risk to the health, safety or welfare of a patient or the public.
  - C. Establish sanctions that include fines or the revocation of hospital licensure for the failure of a hospital to develop and implement valid staffing systems.
  - D. Monitors compliance through use of an annual random audit of a sample of the hospitals to verify compliance with the above requirements. The audit report will be available for public inspection. The cost of the audit will be paid out of funds from licensing fees paid by hospitals.
3. Recognize, support, and advance the application of the above staffing principles practices to all areas of nursing practice, recognizing the unique of each clinical setting.

WNA is aware that safe nurse staffing continues to be an area of concern for RNs in Wisconsin. The impact on the nurse when the staffing system fails can result in loss of job, loss of license, civil litigation and criminal charges. A safe nurse staffing legislative approach needs to be comprehensive and take into account outcomes that provide safety for our patients and nurses.

For more information contact WNA at 608-221-0383 or [info@wisconsinnurses.org](mailto:info@wisconsinnurses.org)