Safe Staffing Saves Lives

Introduction

The Pennsylvania State Nurses Association (PSNA) recognizes that professional nurse staffing needs for individual healthcare facilities are unique and must rely on input from nurses at the bedside. PSNA supports safe staffing legislation that utilizes the “Principles for Nurse Staffing” developed by the American Nurses Association (ANA). This legislation focuses on quality patient outcomes through the collaborative efforts of hospital administrators and nurses at the bedside to develop a safe staffing plan.

Keep Patients Safe

• Studies consistently find an association between higher levels of staffing by experienced RNs and lower rates of adverse outcomes for patients
• In 2007, researchers concluded that adding one full-time RN per patient per day eliminated 16% of hospital-related deaths
• The most important issues affecting quality healthcare and medical error rates are: (1) Workload, stress or fatigue among healthcare professionals; (2) Too little time spent with patients (70%); and (3) Too few nurses (69%)

Nurse Retention

• Due to high levels of dissatisfaction and burnout, almost 23% of surveyed nurses plan to quit their current jobs within the next year; for nurses under 30 years of age, that figure rose to 33%
• The number of new graduate nurses who leave within the first year is as high as 50% of new hires
• More than 43% of U.S. hospital nurses demonstrated high levels of burnout
• Short staffing can lead to longer shifts and nurse fatigue. The odds of making an error during a shift of 12.5 hours or longer are over three times as great as during a shift of 8.5 hours or less

Issue

Massive reductions in nursing budgets, combined with the challenges presented by a growing nursing shortage results in few nurses working longer hours and caring for sicker patients.

Safe staffing levels remain a top priority for professional nurses at the bedside in Pennsylvania. Studies find that safe staffing levels contribute to (1) better patient outcomes, (2) improved job satisfaction and (3) a decrease in overall healthcare costs.

Identifying and maintaining the appropriate number and mix of nursing staff is a challenge facing our healthcare facilities today. Therefore, PSNA supports legislation that includes input from nurses at the bedside to develop and implement a safe staffing plan that has a primary focus on patient safety and quality of care.
Supporting Legislative Change

PSNA proposes that the staffing system:

- Be created with input from at least 50% of registered nurses at the bedside
- Be based on the patients’ degree of sickness, the number of patients on the unit and the resources available
- Reflect the level of experience and education of the caregivers
- Reflect the guidelines on staffing levels set by nursing specialty organizations

PSNA proposes to ensure compliance by:

- Allowing the Department of Health to impose civil monetary penalties for violations
- Including whistle-blower protection for RNs
- Requiring reporting of staffing information, posting daily staffing plan for each shift, and the number of licensed and unlicensed staff providing direct patient care, specifically identifying the number of RNs

Solution

- Key to establishing the right staffing levels for any one unit is taking into account the degree of patients’ sickness, the level of education and experience of the staff and the design of the unit.

- Recognizing nurses as professionals and partners in providing safe, quality patient care to all patients.

- Allow bedside nurses voices to be heard to better effect patient’s quality, safety and outcomes.

- Allows flexibility to adjust staffing standards to meet the staffing needs and concerns in each individual hospital and each unit within that hospital.