

The Coalition to Protect Massachusetts Patients

Fact Sheet on the Patient Safety Act

The Problem: Understaffing of Registered Nurses is Dangerous

Understaffing is a part of the health care crisis facing this nation and the state of Massachusetts. As efforts are made to cut costs, staff and patients suffer tremendously. Registered nurses are being forced to care for too many patients at once, and **patients endure the consequences in the form of preventable errors, avoidable complications, increased lengths of stay, and readmissions.**



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The Solution: The Patient Safety Act, House Bill 3912

The Patient Safety Act calls upon the Department of Public Health to set a safe limit on the number of patients a nurse is assigned at one time. In addition, the bill calls for staffing to be adjusted based on patient needs. It also bans mandatory overtime, and includes initiatives to increase nursing faculty and nurse recruitment.

On May 22, 2008 the Massachusetts House of Representatives passed this bill by a vote of 120-35. To date, over 130 health care and consumer advocacy groups have endorsed the bill and joined the Coalition to Protect Massachusetts Patients.

The Facts: Safe Staffing Saves Lives and Protects Patient Safety

Studies by the most respected medical researchers affirm the significance on patient safety of safe limits on how many patients an RN must care for at one time.



• The higher the patient-to-nurse ratio in a hospital, the more likely there will be patient deaths or complications after surgery. Each additional patient per nurse over 4 jeopardizes patient safety substantially (*JAMA, Oct. 2002*).

• There is a **'strong and consistent' link between nurse staffing levels and patient outcomes.** Improved RN staffing reduces rates of hospital-acquired infections, pneumonia, shock, cardiac arrest, gastrointestinal bleeding, and other adverse outcomes (*New England Journal of Medicine, May 2002*).



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Take Action to Protect Patient Safety!

- Go to www.capwiz.com/massnurses and send an email to your state representative and state senator asking them to take action on this bill as soon as possible!
- Call your legislators and tell them you want An Act Relative to Patient Safety to ensure the quality of patient care in Massachusetts!

House and Senate Switchboard – 617.722.2000

For more information on the bill or to find out how you can help go to www.protectmasspatients.org

Research on Massachusetts Hospitals Shows Patients are Suffering Under Current Staffing Conditions in Hospitals

It is not uncommon for nurses in Massachusetts' hospitals to be assigned six, seven, eight or even 12 patients at a time. According to the research, these practices place patients at a dramatically increased risk of injury or death.

A survey of past patients in Massachusetts' hospitals found that one in four patients (an estimated 235,000 patients a year) reported their safety was compromised during their hospital stay due to their nurse having too many other patients to care for (Opinion Dynamics Corp.; March, 2005).

A survey of Massachusetts physicians conducted in April of 2005 by Opinion Dynamics Corp. found that:

- 82 percent of doctors agree that the quality of care in Massachusetts hospitals is suffering due to understaffing of RNs.
- 78 percent say RN staffing levels in hospitals are too low.
- 61 percent are aware of medical errors that occurred because of RNs having to care for too many patients at once.

There is Not a Shortage of Nurses—There is a Shortage of Nurses Willing to Work in Hospitals

Burned out with high patient loads, RNs are leaving the bedside or working less. Massachusetts has had more RNs per capita than any other state in the country, but less than 50 percent are working at the bedside and nearly 60 percent of bedside nurses are working only part time. Both nationally and in Massachusetts we have seen a consistent increase in the number of licensed RNs and a simultaneous decrease in the number of those RNs working in hospitals.

The best way to retain skilled nurses in our hospitals is to establish minimum safe staffing standards. Enrollments in nursing schools continue to skyrocket and many schools have long waiting lists. A survey of registered nurses in Massachusetts completed by Opinion Dynamics Corp. in July of 2005 found that 65 percent of those nurses not working in hospitals would be likely to return to hospital nursing if the Patient Safety Act were passed. This represents a pool of more than 30,000 nurses!

Increasing RN Staffing is Cost Effective Better Care Reduces Costs

**HEALTH
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*The Policy Journal
of the Health Sphere*

Safe minimum RN staffing levels eliminate unnecessary complications, reduce preventable medical errors and curb extended hospital stays, thereby saving precious health care dollars.

January/February, 2006: An **“unequivocal business case”** can be made for increasing the level of registered nurse staffing in hospitals. This move could pay for itself in fewer patient deaths, shorter hospital stays and decreased rates of costly medical complications.

Safe Staffing Decreases RN Turnover and Save Money

Unsafe staffing levels are burning out nurses and increasing turnover rates, costing hospitals millions to recruit and train new nurses and hire agency nurses. The cost of replacing just one medical/surgical RN is \$46,000 and the cost of replacing a critical care RN is more than \$65,000. Hospitals with higher turnover rates have a 36 percent higher cost per discharge. Higher turnover leads to lower profitability. In other words, lower patient loads will keep nurses at the bedside and save money.