**Nursing in Ohio: A Need for Updated Staffing Legislation**

Safe staffing has increasingly become one of the top nursing concerns. Even after the state of Ohio passed legislation in 2008 to address safe staffing levels, nurses continue to report being overworked and fatigued. Reductions in nursing budgets, combined with an aging patient population and an increase in patients entering the system, has resulted in fewer nurses working longer hours and caring for sicker patients.[[1]](#endnote-1)

As nurses are the largest clinical subgroup in hospitals,[[2]](#endnote-2) this can impact patient care and safety. Despite regulations on shift length and cumulative working hours for resident physicians and workers in other shiftwork industries, there are no national work hour policies for registered nurses (RNs).

Nurse Fatigue

* Nurse fatigue can negatively affect hospital operational costs, patient and employee satisfaction,[[3]](#endnote-3) reduce job performance and decrease patient safety.[[4]](#endnote-4)
* Almost one-fifth of the nurses working permanent night shifts reported struggling to stay awake while taking care of a patient at least once during the previous month.[[5]](#endnote-5)
* Insufficient sleep has been associated with cognitive problems, mood alterations, reduced job performance, reduced motivation, increased safety risks, and physiological changes.[[6]](#endnote-6)
* The Staff Nurse Fatigue and Patient Safety Study found a significant relationship between sleep in the prior 24 hours and the risk of making an error. Researchers determined that there was a 3.4 percent chance of an error when nurses obtained 6 or fewer hours of sleep in the prior 24 hours and 12 or fewer hours of sleep in the prior 48 hours.[[7]](#endnote-7)
* Studies have shown that 12-hour shifts and frequent overtime are associated with difficulties staying awake on duty, reduced sleep times, and nearly triple the risk of making an error.vi

Staffing

* According to the American Nurses Association HealthyNurse™ health risk appraisal (HRA):
  + 82 percent of respondents identified stress as the top risk at work.[[8]](#endnote-8)
  + 58 percent said they often must work through breaks to complete their workload.viii
  + 58 percent report working beyond their shift hours to get work done.viii
* Research shows that having the appropriate nurse staffing can lead to improved patient satisfaction, and reductions in medical errors, hospital readmissions and patient mortality.ii
  + A multi-hospital study over a two-year period demonstrated that as the proportion of RNs increased, medication errors decreased. The study found that for every 20 percent decrease in staffing below the staffing minimum, medication errors increased by 18 percent.[[9]](#endnote-9)
* Better work environment for nurses decreases the odds of both inpatient mortality and failure to rescue by 9 percent and 10 percent respectively.[[10]](#endnote-10)
* Inadequate nurse staffing can lead to staff injures, nurse burnout and increased turnover.ii
* A 2013 study found a significant association between mortality and understaffed nursing shifts in a large academic medical center, reinforcing the need to match staffing with patients’ needs for nursing care.[[11]](#endnote-11)
* Increases in RN staffing have been shown to reduce the length of a patient’s stay by 24-31 percent.[[12]](#endnote-12)

Mandatory Overtime

* Higher non-overtime nurse staffing decreases the odds of readmission of medical/surgical patients by approximately 50 percent and reduces post-discharge emergency department visits.[[13]](#endnote-13)
* Nurses working 12 or more hours per shift report higher burnout and job dissatisfaction, and as hours increase to 13 or more, patient dissatisfaction increases as well.[[14]](#endnote-14)
* Working overtime, whether at the end of a regularly scheduled shift (even an 8-hour shift) or working more than 40 hours in a week, was associated with a statistically significant increase in the risk of making an error.[[15]](#endnote-15),[[16]](#endnote-16)
* According to a National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) report, working more than 40 hours per week (overtime), working extended shifts (more than 8 hours), and working both extended shifts and overtime can have adverse effects on worker health. Extended shifts have been associated with increased musculoskeletal injuries,cardiovascular symptoms, the development of hypertension, and higher risks for injury.[[17]](#endnote-17)

To learn more about nurse staffing and ONA, please visit <http://www.ohnurses.org/staffing>.

**# # #**

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