



Safe Staffing Levels Improves Nursing Shortage

Pennsylvania's RN Shortage

Pennsylvania, like most states, has a shortage of registered nurses. It is projected that the state will need an additional 16,000 registered nurses by 2010.

Pennsylvania's 2005 vacancy rate for registered nurses is 7.8%. The state needs more nurses to be there for the expected rise in more-and sicker-patients. (HAP Statewide Workforce Survey)



The Dangers of the Nursing Shortage

The shortage of nurses in hospitals currently poses problems for patient care, as hospitals try to make up for the shortage by forcing nurses to take too many patients than they can properly care for, and to work excessive hours.

- **One-fourth of patient injuries or deaths in hospitals is directly impacted by the shortage in nurses**, according to the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations' 2002 report.
- **Preventable deaths and patient complication rates were up to nine times higher in hospitals** where the most care was given by licensed practical nurses and aides, not better-trained RNs, according to a 2002 study by Harvard and Vanderbilt University researchers, examining millions of 1997 hospital cases.
- **For each additional patient over four assigned to a nurse, the risk of dying after surgery rose 7 percent**, according to a 2002 survey of 168 Pennsylvania hospitals by Linda Aiken, director of the Center for Health Outcomes and Policy Research at the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing.

The California Comparison: Safe Staffing, More Nurses

Compare this situation to California's, where the nursing shortage has begun to turn due in large part to a California law that requires safe RN-to-patient ratios in hospitals. These ratios have been shown to be a critical factor in keeping and bringing in new RNs.

- **The number of actively licensed RNs in California increased by more than 60,000 following enactment of the staffing ratio law**, from 246,068 as of June 30, 1999 to 306,140 as of December 30, 2005. (Board of Registered Nursing data)
- **Since the ratio law was signed, the number of actively licensed RNs has grown by nearly 10,000 a year**, compared to just 3,200 a year prior to the law. (BRN data). At the time the law was passed, the BRN was predicting the annual increase would be just 2,000 a year in the coming years.
- **RN applications have increased 60%** in the years following the ratio law's enactment.
- **California's biggest hospitals have had their vacancy rates fall below 5%**. The national average is between 15-25%.