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### Issue Paper 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 Safe 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 Safe 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 Safe 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.

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

- ?? Hold health care organizations accountable for the development and implementation of valid and reliable nurse staffing plan;
- ?? Created with input from direct care RNs in collaboration with the unit manager and Chief Nursing Officer;
- ?? Based on the number of patients and patient acuity level, with consideration given to patient admissions, discharges, and transfers on each shift;
- ?? Reflect the level of preparation and experience of those providing care;
- ?? Reflect staffing levels recommended by specialty nursing organizations;
- ?? RNs assigned to work in a particular unit are competent to do so;
- ?? Policies that address both voluntary and mandatory overtime that include consideration of the research on nurse fatigue and patient safety;
- ?? Regular evaluation of care using validated nursing-sensitive indicators.

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)