

TRACKING TRENDS

Nurse Staffing

More than 12,000 nurses work in healthcare organizations in Rhode Island. These women and men are central to the caregiving team. Each year, 600,000 Rhode Islanders benefit from the expertise, commitment and compassion of Rhode Island nurses.

Staffing at hospitals is safe, and we have worked in recent years to make information about the care we provide more transparent to patients and families. HARI member hospitals recently posted nurse staffing reports to a public website, providing greater transparency and accountability.

PatientCareLink

The Hospital Association of Rhode Island (HARI) and its members have joined *PatientCareLink*, a preeminent healthcare transparency and quality and safety website, dedicated to voluntarily providing patients, families and caregivers current and relevant information about the care provided at participating hospitals and home care providers.

The website makes it easier for the public to access important quality and safety information from the contributing caregivers, and assists patients and their families to become more active participants in the care they receive.

Web visitors can select specific hospitals and see the staffing plans and reports for individual units, including emergency departments, at hospitals across Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Hospitals also explain any significant variation (+/-5%) from their budgeted staffing plans on the site. The actual staffing and variance from budgeted data for the FY2016 were posted earlier this year.

The actual staffing reports can help patients and families better understand how important the entire caregiving team is to safe and high-quality care.

The Massachusetts Hospital Association (MHA) and the Organization of Nurse Leaders of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire and Connecticut (ONL), were the founding co-sponsors of Patients First – the 2005 groundbreaking healthcare transparency effort to improve patient care quality and safety – as well as the re-branded *PatientCareLink* website, which launched in 2010.





Nursing Legislation

The Rhode Island General Assembly is considering two important bills regarding nurse staffing. HARI strongly opposes both measures.

Nurse Staffing Ratio

HARI opposes legislation that would arbitrarily dictate nurse staffing ratios. The bill (S 0483 sponsored by Sen. James Doyle and H 5353 sponsored by Rep. Christopher Blazewski) limits the maximum number of patients assigned to a registered nurse.

Patient care is best determined by the caregiving team at the bedside, not by an arbitrary formula. Patient needs change hour-by-hour, therefore staffing decisions need to be flexible and made by the caregiving team in the best interest of our patients. These trained professionals should not be held to arbitrary numbers and legislated mandates.

Hospitals are working to manage costs, and make care more affordable for Rhode Islanders, amidst significant proposed cuts.

Mandated ratios do not offer good patient-centered value or improved patient outcomes for our state. These mandates would reverse progress that has been made.

California remains the only state in the nation to enact a law mandating nurse-to-patient ratios across all hospital patient care areas. No scientific study has ever pinpointed a fixed number for the optimum nurse-to-patient ratio because a single number applicable to all hospitals, all nurses, and all patients does not exist.

Nurse Licensure

Legislation has been introduced to dictate how hospitals ensure appropriate staffing to care for patients. The bill (H 5314 sponsored by Rep. David Bennett) would require healthcare facilities to use nurses licensed in Rhode Island to satisfy staffing needs. It would prohibit use of the nationally-recognized Nurse Licensure Compact, which provides reciprocity for nurses licensed in states belonging to the compact.

Since 2008, the Nurse Licensure Compact has provided flexibility to staff according to patient volume by allowing nurses from 24 other states to cross state borders and practice without the cumbersome need to relicense in each state.

Hospitals recognize there will always be opportunity to improve the support system and decision-making process, but improvements cannot be achieved by permanently eliminating autonomy to staff appropriately. This is not an issue that requires a legislative solution. There is a process in place to ensure adequate staffing that includes utilizing existing staff, offering overtime, and then utilizing agency nurses if needed. Common reasons for utilizing agency/compact nurses are vacation, holiday/leave of absence, seasonal volume, and difficulty filling positions.

In addition, as state leaders work toward healthcare transformation and the most efficient system possible, this bill would increase costs. Limiting methods for delivering care stifles innovation and shortchanges patients.

These two proposals will negatively impact every hospital, healthcare provider, insurance payer, and patient in Rhode Island. There is no scientific evidence that these measures, which will increase cost, will enhance patient outcomes or improve the working environment. We must ensure legislative changes always improve the efficiency and quality of care provided in our state.