

Better Nurse-Patient Ratios Could Save Thousands of Lives Annually, Says Study

In a report recently published in the journal, *Health Services Research*, and the first comprehensive evaluation of California's controversial 2004 nurse staffing ratio mandate researchers found that if these mandates had been in place in Pennsylvania and New Jersey in 2006 it could have saved 468 lives.

The study's leading author, Linda Aiken, director of the Center for Health Outcomes and Policy Research at the University Of Pennsylvania School Of Nursing says that the difference between staffing at hospitals in California verses New Jersey and Pennsylvania "is very large, about two more patients per nurse (in medical surgical units). And that's very significant."

Ms. Aiken attributed the decline in California's mortality to better nurse-patient ratios because "Nurses are the main surveillance system in hospitals." Eighteen (18) other states are considering lowering their nurse-staff ratios.

Similar disparities were seen for nurses working in other units such as oncology, labor and delivery, telemetry and pediatrics.

Also, Aiken reported that 88% of nurses surveyed in a medical-surgical unit in California reported having five patients. Aiken found that each patient added to a nurse's workload added 7% to the mortality rate for patients undergoing common surgeries. Nurses with higher workloads were also associated with more nurse burnout, job dissatisfaction and precursors of voluntary turnover.

This report confirmed what nurses have suggested for years, heavy workloads contribute to errors and prevent dedicated nurses from being able to provide the quality of care the patient expects and deserves.