



Improving Patient Outcomes with High Nurse to Patient Ratios: A Quality Improvement Project

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Background

While the field of nursing is consistently voted the most trusted profession and offers high levels of job security, in more recent years, there has been a notable shortage of nurses throughout many disciplines and healthcare facilities across the world. The core of the nursing profession is quality patient-centered care, yet the decline in retention of nurses is distinctly felt by the patient population. Various factors contribute to the phenomenon of understaffing amongst hospitals and long-term care facilities such as an increasing workload, physiological and psychological stress which can lead to subsequent burnout, a population that is becoming older and more acutely ill, and even expansion upon the nurses' scope of practice and responsibilities. The American Nurses Association projects the field of nursing to incur around 100,000 new jobs for registered nurses in the upcoming year of 2022, however, with a generation of nurses retiring and some leaving to further their education, there is a gross need for an estimated 1.1 million new registered nurses in order to avoid a detrimental shortage (n.d.). However, simply asking healthcare facilities nationwide to take on more employees (therefore more financial burden) is unfeasible, so the solution lies in modifying nursing practice at the bedside.

Objective

The main objective of this project is to develop evidenced-based guidelines to promote positive outcomes with a high nurse-to-patient ratio.

Nursing Implications

- Provide education to the nursing education coordinator at a large urban teaching hospital on the importance of prioritizing assessments, organizing the workload, teamwork, communication, being open with administration, self-care, keeping a positive attitude, and delegation in order to improve patient outcomes
- The nursing education coordinator can then distribute this evidence-based protocol to all nursing staff at UK
- Research can then be done to compare patient outcomes based on staffing before the evidenced-based protocol was implemented and after the evidenced-based protocol was implemented
- If deemed effective, the evidence-based protocol can then be adopted throughout the UK hospital in an attempt to improve patient outcomes through a high nurse-to-patient ratio



Advantages	Disadvantages
Delegation creates a better workload balance. Meaning that everyone on your team will be contributing evenly and working together to provide quality care to patients.	Patients who are considered a low priority may receive less care.
Prioritizing assignments allows nurses to assess/treat patient who are in more critical conditions first. This can improve patient outcomes because the nurse will be more likely to assess and treat critical patients before a poor outcome occurs.	Increased delegation may place a heavy workload on the UAP leading to errors and burnout.
Being a team player allows call light to be answered faster than if every nurse only cared for their own assigned patients.	
Keeping a positive attitude will help prevent burn out. According to University of St. Augustine, burnout is associated with a decrease in quality patient care.	

Literature Review

Our literature review consisted of numerous articles with a total of 40. There were 33 quantitative and 7 qualitative research articles reviewed. The research was performed within different countries. The countries our articles included was the United States, Germany, Finland, and Japan. There were three common themes identified among the articles. One theme emerged from the articles was high nurse to patient ratios increases the risk for hospital acquired infections. A second theme was higher levels of understaffing are associated with higher mistreatment rates. The last theme was there is a direct correlation between understaffed nursing and patient safety. Through this literature review we were able to develop guidelines to help staff and patients. The guidelines will help improve staff to patient ratios and improve patient outcomes. After reading and understanding 40 articles, we were able to conclude that when the number of nurses decrease, patient centered care also decreases.

Guidelines

Guidelines to Promote Positive Patient Outcomes with A High Nurse-to-Patient Ratio

Prioritize Your Assignments:

- Categorize your daily tasks into high, medium, and low priority.
- High Priority Example: Critical Assessments/Interventions
- Remember your ABC's: Airway, Breathing, Circulation
- Delegate low priority tasks to unlicensed assistive Personnel (UAP's) or family members.

Organize Your Workload:

- Make a list for what you need to do for each patient.
- Gather all the supplies you need for that patient BEFORE going into their room.
- Keep a running list of important information that you may need to chart later for each patient (ex. Assessments, interventions, questions they may have for the doctor).

Be A Team Player:

- If you see another coworker struggling help them out!
- Remember every patient is your priority too, so every call light is your call light.
- Ask for help from your coworkers in times of need. You all are heroes, but even Batman has Robin.

Communication is Key:

- Listen to your patient's questions and concerns and communicate those to other healthcare disciplines if you cannot answer or address them.
- Round with the doctors. Listen to the patient's plan of action and ask as many of the questions during this face-to-face time.
- Be open and honest with your patient's.

Be Open with Administration:

- Communicate the concerns you are experiencing to them.
- Form focus groups to help with the understaffing problems.
- They may be able to offer incentives to combat the problem or get travel nursing agency's on board.

Self-care is Important:

- Take a deep breath.....
- Take your designated breaks. If you are unable to leave the unit, find a quiet place to relax.
- Leave work at work!
- Bring nutritious snacks/meals to work.
- Do not work on all of your scheduled days off.
- Understand the burnout is real!
- Get plenty of rest.

Keep A Positive Attitude:

- Remember why you wanted to be a nurse.
- Know that you can make a huge impact on someone's life.
- Practice positive self-talk.
- Focus on the end goal, and not on the small things that are in the way.
- Do not over complicate tasks.

Delegate Effectively:

- Remember the 5 rights of delegation (right task, right circumstance, right person, right supervision, and right direction/communication).
- Things that cannot be delegated are tasks that require clinical reasoning, nursing judgement, or critical interventions/decision making.
- Write down tasks that you have delegated, so you can follow up on them.

References

References are available on request.