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| Important Nursing Issues: Improve Nurse Educational Level, Mandatory Minimum Patient to RN Ratios, Nursing Shortage |
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**Introduction**

The most important nursing issues today are to increase nurse educational level, mandatory minimum patient to RN ratios and nursing shortage. They are all impacted the patient outcome and the registered nurse (RN) job satisfaction. The bachelor science for nursing (BSN) prepared nurses workforce result better patient outcome and higher RN job satisfaction. The mandatory minimum patients to RN ratios can maintain quality of care as well as the nurse satisfaction. Nursing shortage had issues for decades and will worsen as the older population continues to grow; the high rate of RN turnover and also school faculty shortage. If supply of nurses is not adequate for demand, the issue of nursing shortage is worsening in the future. The school faculty shortage is one of the factors in the accelerating nursing shortage (Kelly, 2010). Education is the vital component for professional nursing develop but the government is not paying attention to address the faculty salaries to attract more qualify nurses to enter the academy.

**Improve Nurse Educational Level**

According to the Institute of Medicine report in 2010: “Nursing is unique among the health professions in the United States in that it has multiple educational pathway leading to an entry-level license to practice.” There are three different educational levels for registered nurse to practice in the U.S.A include diploma education, associate degree and baccalaureate degree (Huston, 2009). Nurses are now the least educated of the health care professionals for entry level. Huston (2009) had found disciplines such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy and social worker, pharmacist are all required master or doctoral degree. From the recent report on the future of nursing (IOM, 2011) is recommending to increase the proportion of nurses with a baccalaureate degree to 80 percent by 2020. Nurses are the primary caregivers, the knowledge of the nurses have the positive impact to the patients’ outcome. One of the recent studies has indicated that more BSN prepared nurses in the hospital will be decreased morbidity, mortality, and failure to rescue rates (Altman, 2011). Due to the big cut of reimbursement, the reduction of length of patient’s hospital stay, patients in the hospital and community setting are getting more acute. Nurses now require more critical decision for patient care than before. The advanced technology in health care system is also required higher education nurses. By the year of 2000, diploma education for entry level had virtually disappeared (Huston, 2009). According to Huston (2009): “ Even the stronger supports of the BSN for entry level for nursing practice can’t deny that despite efforts spanning more than 50 years, RN entry at the baccalaureate level continues to be an elusive goals.” In order to make all these nurses to return to school to achieve a BSN degree, adequate nursing program, nursing faculty, tuition reimbursement, and supportive employment must be available.

**Mandatory Minimum Patients to RN Ratios**

Minimum patients to RN staffing ratios should be mandated because the adequate staffing and balance workloads of nurses result better patient outcome. Mandatory ratio is a positive and necessary in the health care system. The focus on staffing ratios for nursing is consistent with research literature that shows an influence of nursing hours of care on various patient outcomes (Dunton, Gaiewski, Klaus & Pierson, 2007). Currently, only California has implemented mandatory nurse staffing ratios on hospitals. Mandatory ratios is a positive and necessary, it became law in California in 1999, However due to the nursing shortage and financial reason, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger delays this bill until 2008( Tevington, 2011). Chapman, Spetz, Kaise, Dower and Herrera (2009), had an analysis of qualitative data from interviews with healthcare leader of 20 hospitals in California on the impact of the mandatory minimum RN ratios. The Chapmen et al.’s (2009) study showed the quality of care was improved as well as the nurse satisfaction. Most of the hospital leaders reported many quality improvement in their hospital include patient safety initiatives, medication error reduction, reduced in patient falls, and implementation of rapid response teams. The nurse turnover rate has decreased and nurses are pleased to have a lower patient load each shift (Chapman et al., 2009).

The mandatory minimum patients to RN staffing ratios also have financial impact. Most of the administrators of the health care institutions only focus on their budget but do not pay attention to the nurses’ workload which may have a negative impact to the patient’s outcome. According to Welton (2007): “ When hospitals do not increase nursing staffing to adequate level, patients’ complications can occur and patient care can deteriorate to the point that hospitals fail economically.” This economic failure occur as a result of the high cost of treating those patient complication, the cost of treating the complication could have been prevented by increasing the nurse staffing and lower the workload for each of the nurses. To assess the cost of these preventable complications cost may help to determine the need of implementing the Mandatory Minimum Patients to RN Ratio. There are more works needed to be done by nursing profession for its successful implementation in the future.

**Nursing Shortage**

Nursing shortage is a global issue but not a local issue only impact the U.S.A. According to Huston(2009), the causes of the current nursing shortage include increasing elderly population, more individuals who are chronically ill; increased acuity care setting, requiring higher-level nursing skills; downsizing and restructuring of the late 1990s, which eliminated many RN positions. From late 1990 and early 2000, some nurses change from full time to part time employment; aging nursing workforce; nursing workforce dissatisfaction; inadequate nursing programs to accommodate interested applicants; women choosing fields other than nursing for a career; aging faculty for RN program, and limited faculty for nursing program.

Sade (2012) reported:“ In the United States, the expanding population is reaching old age more rapidly than in most of the rest of the world, largely because the baby boom of 1946-1964 produced a large bump in population.” By 2030, the rate of population growth related to the baby boom of 1946-1964 will level off, by that time, there is about 20% of the U.S population, about 72 million people will be over the age of 65( Sade,2012). The shortage of hospital stay due to the reduction of reimbursement and the increasing acuity level of patient care required higher level of nursing skills. The increasing intensity patient care also due to the greater number of invasive procedures, more powerful medications and a growing number of patients with chronic acute illness (Welton,2007). The workforce dissatisfaction causes high turnover rate in nursing. A recent estimate of the average turnover rates for nurses in U.S hospital was 21.3%; the average of RN vacancy of 14.6% in the critical care units is the highest rate when compared with other hospital departments ( Hauck, Griffin & Fitzpatrik,2011).

The shortage of nursing faculty is one of the factors in the accelerating nursing shortage for the future (Kelly,2010). According to Kelly: “ Changing from nursing faculty to a nursing administrator, her salary increased by 61% immediately.” Kelly (2010) had found that the doctoral prepared advanced practice nurses are not more willing to work for the lower wages-paid faculty than their master’s prepared folks. It may be necessary for the nursing workforce to pay more attention to the faculty salaries to solve the problem of nursing faculty shortage.

Due to the nursing faculty shortage, U.S nursing schools turn away 49,948 qualified applicants from BSN and graduate nursing program in 2008 ( Altmann,2011) Currently there are 2.7 million RNs in practice in the United States, of which 40.3% of them have associated degrees, 30% have diplomas in nursing and only 29.7% have baccalaureate degree (Megginson).

**Conclusion**

The nurses are the primary care provider of patients. The nursing care is a vital component on patient outcome. The increasing of education level for nursing is important issue. The mandatory minimum patients to RN ratios are a key to provide adequate care to our patients. Increases nurse education level and mandatory minimum patients to RN ratios will decrease nurse burnout and turnover rate. The hospital systems have struggled to survive in the bad economic situation. Administrators have determined that reducing staffing, wages and supplies are ways in which to meet financial needs. Also, the government did not pay close attention to nursing shortage and the faculty shortage. The issues must be addressed and nurses at all levels need to become involved in lobbing.

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