

ACEN Position Statement: Nursing Workload—A Priority for Healthcare

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The Academy of Canadian Executive Nurses (ACEN), the organization of chief nurse executives of teaching hospitals across Canada, has agreed on this position statement on nursing workload. In a previous issue of the *Canadian Journal of Nursing Leadership*, Affonso et al. (2003) identified workload as a significant issue for nurses in delivering processes of care in a way that supports patient safety. We cannot underestimate the importance of appropriate work design and nursing workload to ensure patient safety and the retention of an adequate number of nurses.

We hope that you will find this position statement a useful tool in planning for the future.

ACEN Position

The Academy of Canadian Executive Nurses believes nursing workload is one of the key critical issues to be addressed to ensure patient safety, retention of an

adequate number of nurses for Canada and the ability of nurses in Academic Health Sciences Corporation (AHSC) centres to fulfill their mandate for care, teaching, research and innovation.

Current Situation in Workplace

Currently, nurses perceive that workload exceeds current staffing levels and the capacity of nurses. Nurses are unable to complete all nursing care to the standards defined by professional regulatory bodies. The continued focus on cost and efficiency does not acknowledge the increasing complexity of care being delivered and the impact of cost-saving measures on quality of care. The negative health outcomes arising from excessive workload for the nursing community and the difficulties of retaining students and employees in nursing are compelling reasons to address the negative influence of onerous workload.

Strategies for the Future

A significant body of research evidence links adequate nurse staffing to positive patient outcomes and identifies ways to improve the nursing workplace and provide reasonable workload for nurses. Nursing leaders and healthcare executives must embrace their accountability to design workload in accordance with patient care needs and enable nurses to work to their full scope of practice. The following strategies are suggested:

- Create quality work environments/workplaces.
 - Identify reasonable work assignments.
 - Provide appropriate equipment/tools to carry out nursing work.
 - Provide adequate staff to perform care, support activities.
 - Identify and provide an appropriate mix of professional staff.
 - Provide development and education opportunities for nursing staff.
- Fiscal planning and nursing budgets should provide for:
 - additional resources in terms of time and active preceptorship/supervision to allow for appropriate education/orientation for new graduates and students
 - adequate replacement staff for those who are ill, on education time or on leave



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- adjusting productivity expectations through acknowledgment of such variables as age and experience of the nursing workforce

- Invest in nursing leadership development to lead and sustain the profession.
- Enable nursing staff working in partnership with other health professionals to live their full scope of practice.
- Focus on work design and an environment that acknowledges the needs of both care providers and patients.
- Invest in development of new tools and methodologies to predict, measure and validate nursing workload.

- Determine appropriate nursing productivity benchmarks that include measures of quality of care and patient outcomes as well as the health and performance of the nursing workforce.

Indicators of Success

In order to meet the needs of patients/families while ensuring appropriate nursing workloads, the following should be monitored:

- delivered hours of care per day/visits per specialty area
- utilization of full-time, part-time, casual and per diem staff
- utilization of paid nursing hours:
 - overtime
 - education
 - sick time
- staff outcomes to include satisfaction, workplace injury, sick leave, etc.
- nursing retention and turnover rates
- amount of funding spent on nursing equipment and other tools
- monitoring of nurse-sensitive patient outcomes
- patient satisfaction with nursing care
- ratio of nurses to population

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