

The intersection of Occupational Hazards for Nurses, Safe Staffing, and Infection Control

In this session we will review key occupational hazards confronting RN's and detail the effect they have on the wellbeing of nurses and patients. Healthcare has a greater prevalence of occupational injury and illness than manufacturing, construction, or mining. The negative impact of inadequate RN staffing on several key patient outcomes has been documented in the peer reviewed literature. Nationally, unions and associations representing RNs have been advocating for safe staffing legislation at state and federal levels. Despite the overwhelming evidence, only California has adopted staffing RN to patient ratios to date. Concurrently, there has been a national emphasis on prevention of hospital acquired infections that are recognized as causing one in 25 hospitalized patients to become infected, causing 75,000 deaths per year. The CDC, state and local health departments have instituted surveillance programs and other measures to combat this crisis. However, the impact of HAIs on RNs and healthcare workers is not currently being tracked and research on the effectiveness of occupational control measures is sparse. We recommend passage of safe staffing ratio legislation, surveillance of occupationally acquired infection among healthcare workers, and research into effective control measures to prevent HAIs among patients and staff.