SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS
from the
NURSE STAFFING RESEARCH PAPER*

Findings from the Research Paper**

- The research is clear that having fewer patients per nurse or more nursing care hours per patient day is associated with fewer adverse outcomes. Having fewer patients per nurse is associated with lower rates of mortality, failure to rescue, and some specific adverse events, especially among surgical patients. This association is no longer in dispute.

- In addition to the number of patients per nurse, multiple factors impact staffing effectiveness, including:
    - patient workload and severity of illness,
    - skill level and experience of individual nurses,
    - availability of support staff, and
    - availability of needed equipment and supplies.

- Having fewer patients per nurse can lead to shorter hospital stays and fewer complications. Current models of reimbursing hospitals for nursing care do not take into account variability in care intensity and skill mix.

- The nurse staffing shortage has led to a demand for nursing care that exceeds supply. Inadequate nurse staffing is a contributing factor to the nursing shortage and nurse turnover, an expense to hospitals.

- Health care facilities should conduct systematic and regular evaluations of the impact of staffing plans and models of care on nurse outcomes, such as satisfaction and turnover.

- While more research is recommended, this does not mean hospitals and nurses should not work together to continue improving the impact of staffing plans and policies on nurses and patients.

Conclusions Based on This Research**

- Washington State's collaborative project between health care management and nursing unions presents a unique opportunity to evaluate the effects of innovative approaches to improving nurse staffing based on the scientific evidence. This work can contribute to the expanding body of research on the relationship between nurse staffing and patient outcomes.

- Nurse Sensitive Quality Indicators can be used as a best practice data source to evaluate staffing effectiveness.

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* Pamela Mitchell, *Nurse Staffing: A Summary of Current Research, Opinion and Policy*, August 2009.

** These findings and conclusions are shared by the five organizations on the Ruckelshaus Nurse Staffing Steering Committee: Northwest Organization of Nurse Executives; SEIU Healthcare 1199NW; United Staff Nurses Union, 141 UFCW; Washington State Hospital Association; and Washington State Nurses Association.