Position Statement for Patient Safety and Work Hours for Nurses
Organization of Nurse Leaders
Management of Practice Committee
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OVERVIEW
The Organization of Nurse Leaders (ONL) of Massachusetts & Rhode Island believes that every person deserves access to health care and that its members have the responsibility to ensure safe practice conditions for all nurses.

ONL realizes that the demand for nursing care will continue to exceed the supply of nurses and is expected to worsen over the next decade. ONL is committed to working with nursing organizations, legislators, public policy leaders, and others in order to develop short and long-term strategies which address workforce issues. Strategies to mitigate fatigue and promote effective staffing systems must balance the need to protect and sustain a safe practice environment for nurses and other clinical staff while simultaneously prioritizing patient needs.

BACKGROUND
Recent evidence exists that significantly demonstrates the correlation between nurse fatigue and the increased risk of errors that can potentially compromise patient care quality and safety:
  * Errors and near errors are more likely to occur when nurses work 12 or more hours (Rogers, et al, 2004).
  * Eighty-one percent of the time nurses work longer than their shift, with 6% of that time being mandated (Rogers, 2004).
  * Nineteen percent of nurses work two or more jobs for multiple employers (Trinkoff, et al, 2006 and Scott et al, 2006).
  * Deteriorating performance over 12-hour shifts was found, across all industries, when the work week was longer than 40 hours (NIOSH, 2004).
  * Nurses average 6.7 hours of sleep on the days that they work (Scott, et al, 2006).

ONL POSITION
Therefore, it is the position of ONL that it is imperative for nursing leadership and staff nurses to collaborate and share joint responsibility to establish planning processes that:
  1) Consider total hours worked and the effects of fatigue on human performance when determining length of shifts and patient care assignments.
  2) Integrate innovative strategies that support adequate rest and time away from the workplace between worked shifts.
  3) Ensure the availability of sufficient system resources.
  4) Develop a Fatigue Management Plan that includes providing opportunities for staff to express concerns about fatigue.
  5) Educate staff about sleep hygiene and the effects of fatigue on patient safety.
  6) Identify tasks that should not be done by individuals on extended work hours.
  7) Establish staff responsibility to be rested when presenting for work.

RATIONALE

Because hospitals provide 24/7 health care and workload is unpredictable, nurse leaders must have the flexibility to manage changing patient care needs, while ensuring that competent staff delivers quality nursing care. ONL encourages organizations to develop strategies to assure there are sufficient competent nurses available and to share best practices that meet these scheduling guidelines.

TALKING POINTS

- Hospitals recognize that this is a challenging time to begin a dialogue on fatigue as difficult economic times may lead employees to seek more hours (and pay) to meet personal and family financial needs.
- Fatigued employees put themselves at risk. Evidence exists that risk for injury increases when an employee is fatigued (i.e. needle sticks).
- There is a growing body of research on fatigue, hours of work, and shift work that can help hospitals and employees to work together to develop policies and practices based on scientific- evidence in regards to number of hours worked.
- Working conditions are not the only factor blamed for fatigue. Inadequate rest due to family obligations (sick child, spouse, or elder), personal lifestyle or sleeping routines, working more than one job, or working excessive hours, all contribute to fatigue.
- As employers, we take our responsibility to address fatigue very seriously by stressing that employees take breaks, developing realistic work schedules, and allowing for adequate recovery between shifts.
- Hospitals are making every effort to make their employees aware of the issue of fatigue and its impact on work performance, and encouraging the development of response strategies.
- Fatigue is an emerging issue. Solutions are being developed by collecting data at the worksite, reviewing the data with experts, and by working directly with employees. There are no hard and fast solutions of "quick fixes".

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