

## **Economics vs. Patient Acuity? Which Provides Better Patient Outcomes?**

**Maria M. Marquez, BSN, RN**

**Sierra Medical Center**

**PROBLEM:** Research supports that staffing an intensive care unit based on patient acuity is crucial to patient outcomes, yet nursing does not have a single measure or process that guides appropriate staffing levels in hospitals or acute care facilities.

**EVIDENCE:** Clinical PICO question: Does staffing an intensive care unit based on a daily census versus patient acuity meet individualized patient needs? The most relevant and best evidence was collected, and was evaluated using critical appraisal tools.

**STRATEGY:** The following databases were searched: AHRQ, NGC, & Academic Search Complete. Interviews were held with local hospital directors, critical care manager, and AOD.

**PRACTICE CHANGE:** To implement a policy for a detailed staffing level for an intensive care unit based on patient acuity rather than numbers.

**EVALUATION:** Measured outcomes in the literature included a comprehensive multifactorial approach. Measures included patient-dependency models, nursing-sensitive indicators of patient care, statistical analysis, nurse staffing measures, nursing care delivery models, hospital statistics (Nursing Quality Improvement Committee, NQIC), & multiple regression models.

**RESULTS:** Overall studies indicate that richer nurse staffing based on acuity levels is associated with better patient outcomes.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** Establish a specific staffing level guide policy in order to have a solid scientific basis with nurse staffing decisions rather than one which is economically driven.

## Bibliography

- Department of Nursing Graduate Studies Lehman College, City University of New York, USA. (2007). How many nurses are enough? A pilot study measuring nursing hours per patient day and patient outcomes. *Chia Colombia*, April, 7 (1).
- Melnyk, B.M., & Fineout-Overholt, E. (2005). *Evidence-based practice in nursing & healthcare: A guide to best practice*. Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.
- Minnesota Evidence-based Practice Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota. (2007). Prepared for Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services . Evidence Report/Technology Assessment Number 151. Nurse Staffing and quality of patient care.
- Rischbieth, A. (2006). Matching nurse skill with patient acuity in the intensive care units: a risk management mandate. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 14 (5): 397-404.
- Seago, J.A. (1999). Chapter 39. Nurse staffing, models of care delivery, and Interventions. University of California, San Francisco School of Nursing.
- Yang, K.P. (2003). Relationships between nurse staffing and patient outcomes. *Journal of Nursing Research*, 11 (3).