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Contacts:

Karen Jensen, RN
Yuma Regional Medical Center
(928) 336-7201

Mardy Taylor, RN, MBA
Yavapai Regional Medical Center
(928) 771-5684

Joyce Benjamin, MSN, RN
Arizona Nurses Association
(480) 831-0404

Joint Statement on National Nurse Staffing Ratios

Arizona's nurses, nurse leaders and hospital executives work together to deliver high quality, appropriate and cost-efficient care to all patients. Because of this partnership on behalf of patients, the Arizona Nurses Association (AzNA), the Arizona Organization of Nurse Executives (AzONE) and the Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association (AzHHA) oppose national legislation mandating nurse staffing ratios in hospitals.

"Ratios undercut the skills, knowledge and experience of nursing professionals," said Jennifer Mensik, RN, president, Arizona Nurses Association. "Ratios are inflexible numbers that do not take into account individual patients' needs and different levels of acuity and complexity among patients."

Registered nurses, in partnership with healthcare teams in hospitals statewide, develop "acuity" plans that are tailored to the individual needs of their patients. Staffing systems that are customized to meet the unique circumstances in each hospital are in the best interest of the patient.

Throughout hospitals, registered nurses are required to continually assess patients for acuity and nurse staffing needs. They use their professional judgment to determine the nursing care patients require.

Arizona already has effective rules that ensure patients receive the right amount and quality of nursing care. Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) rules mandate that registered nurses in Arizona hospitals:

- maintain a 1-2 nurse-to-patient staffing ratio for all critical care patients regardless of location in the hospital;

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- assess patients continuously, establishing nurse staffing requirements based on an individual patient's acuity, the patient's need for hospital services based on that patient's medical condition; and
- establish as well as document acuity plans to determine the number and type of nursing personnel necessary to provide nursing services to meet the needs of patients.

These acuity plans require the direct participation of bedside nurses who exercise their judgment and expertise to determine the best staffing plan for patient care. Patient acuity may change at any time. Unlike mandated ratios, acuity plans allow nursing professionals to adjust staffing for these changes. Acuity-based plans are based on effective staffing systems that allow hospitals to match the needs of individual patients with nursing resources each shift, each day.

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