

From **Title 22 Section 5** as of March 2007

**§70217. Nursing Service Staff.**

Note • History

Hospitals shall provide staffing by licensed nurses, within the scope of their licensure in accordance with the following **nurse-to-patient ratios.**

Licensed nurse means a registered nurse, licensed vocational nurse and, in psychiatric units only, a licensed psychiatric technician.

Staffing for care not requiring a licensed nurse is not included within these ratios and shall be determined pursuant to the **patient classification system.**

No hospital shall assign a licensed nurse to a nursing unit or clinical area unless that hospital determines that the licensed nurse has **demonstrated current competence** in providing care in that area, and has also received **orientation to that hospital's clinical area** sufficient to provide competent care to patients in that area.

The **policies and procedures** of the hospital shall contain the hospital's criteria for making this determination.

Licensed nurse-to-patient ratios represent the **maximum number of patients** that shall be assigned to one licensed nurse at any one time.

**"Assigned"** means the licensed nurse has responsibility for the provision of care to a particular patient within his/her scope of practice.

There shall be **no averaging** of the number of patients and the total number of licensed nurses on the unit during any one shift nor over any period of time.

Only licensed nurses providing **direct patient care** shall be included in the ratios.

## **NURSE ADMINISTRATORS**

**Nurse Administrators**, Nurse Supervisors, Nurse Managers, and Charge Nurses, and other licensed nurses shall be included in the calculation of the licensed nurse-to-patient ratio only when those licensed nurses are engaged in providing direct patient care.

When a **Nurse Administrator**, Nurse Supervisor, Nurse Manager, Charge Nurse or other licensed nurse is engaged in activities other than direct patient care, that nurse shall not be included in the ratio.

**Nurse Administrators**, Nurse Supervisors, Nurse Managers, and Charge Nurses who have **demonstrated current competence** to the hospital in providing care on a particular unit may relieve licensed nurses during ***breaks, meals, and other routine, expected absences from the unit.***

## **LVN**

**Licensed vocational nurses** may constitute up to 50 percent of the licensed nurses assigned to patient care on any unit, except where registered nurses are required pursuant to the patient classification system or this section.

Only registered nurses shall be assigned to **Intensive Care Newborn Nursery** Service Units, which specifically require one registered nurse to two or fewer infants.

In the **Emergency Department**, only registered nurses shall be assigned to triage patients and only registered nurses shall be assigned to critical trauma patients.

## **SPECIFIC AND TIME LIMITED TASKS**

Nothing in this section shall prohibit a licensed nurse from **assisting with specific tasks** within the scope of his or her practice for a patient assigned to another nurse.

**"Assist"** means that licensed nurses may provide patient care beyond their patient assignments if the tasks performed **are specific and time limited.**

## **(1) CRITICAL CARE UNIT**

The licensed nurse-to-patient ratio in a critical care unit shall be 1:2 or fewer at all times. "Critical care unit" means a nursing unit of a general acute care hospital which provides one of the following services: an intensive care service, a burn center, a coronary care service, an acute respiratory service, or an intensive care newborn nursery service.

### **(1a) NICU**

In the intensive care newborn nursery service, the ratio shall be 1:2 1 registered nurse: 2 or fewer patients at all times.

Only registered nurses shall be assigned to Intensive Care Newborn Nursery Service Units, which specifically require one registered nurse to two or fewer infants.

## **(2) OPERATING ROOM**

The surgical service operating room shall have at least 1:1 one registered nurse assigned to the duties of the circulating nurse and a minimum of one additional person serving as scrub assistant for each patient occupied operating room.

The scrub assistant may be a licensed nurse, an operating room technician, or other person who has demonstrated current competence to the hospital as a scrub assistant, but shall not be a physician or other licensed health professional who is assisting in the performance of surgery.

## **(3) LABOR AND DELIVERY**

The licensed nurse-to-patient ratio in a labor and delivery suite of the perinatal service shall be 1:2 or fewer active labor patients at all times.

When a licensed nurse is caring for antepartum patients who are not in active labor, the licensed nurse-to-patient ratio shall be 1:4 or fewer at all times.

## **(4) PERINATAL SERVICES**

The licensed nurse-to-patient ratio in a postpartum area of the perinatal service shall be 1:4 mother baby couplets or fewer at all times.

In the event of multiple births, the total number of mothers plus infants assigned to a single licensed nurse shall never exceed eight.

#### **(4a) POSTPARTUM**

For postpartum areas in which the licensed nurse's assignment consists of mothers only, the licensed nurse-to-patient ratio shall be 1:6 or fewer at all times.

#### **(5) COMBINED L+D POSTPARTUM**

The licensed nurse-to-patient ratio in a combined Labor/Delivery/Postpartum area of the perinatal service shall be 1:3 or fewer at all times the licensed nurse is caring for a patient combination of one woman in active labor and a postpartum mother and infant

The licensed nurse-to-patient ratio for nurses caring for women in active labor only, antepartum patients who are not in active labor only, postpartum women only, or mother-baby couplets only, shall be the same ratios as stated in subsections (3) and (4) above for those categories of patients.

#### **(6) PEDIATRICS**

The licensed nurse-to-patient ratio in a pediatric service unit shall be 1:4 or fewer at all times.

#### **(7) PACU**

The licensed nurse-to-patient ratio in a postanesthesia recovery unit of the anesthesia service shall be 1:2 or fewer at all times, regardless of the type of anesthesia the patient received.

#### **(8) EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT**

In a hospital providing basic emergency medical services or comprehensive emergency medical services, the licensed nurse-to-patient ratio in an emergency department shall be 1:4 or fewer at all times that patients are receiving treatment.

There shall be no fewer than two licensed nurses physically present in the emergency department when a patient is present.

In the Emergency Department, only registered nurses shall be assigned to triage patients and only registered nurses shall be assigned to critical trauma patients.

At least one of the licensed nurses shall be a registered nurse assigned to triage patients.

The registered nurse assigned to triage patients shall be immediately available at all times to triage patients when they arrive in the emergency department. When there are no patients needing triage, the registered nurse may assist by performing other nursing tasks. The registered nurse assigned to triage patients shall not be counted in the licensed nurse-to-patient ratio.

Hospitals designated by the Local Emergency Medical Services (LEMS) Agency as a "base hospital", as defined in section 1797.58 of the Health and Safety Code, shall have either a licensed physician or a registered nurse on duty to respond to the base radio 24 hours each day.

When the duty of base radio responder is assigned to a registered nurse, that registered nurse may assist by performing other nursing tasks when not responding to radio calls, but shall be immediately available to respond to requests for medical direction on the base radio. The registered nurse assigned as base radio responder shall not be counted in the licensed nurse-to-patient ratios.

### **Critical Care Patients in ER**

When licensed nursing staff are attending critical care patients in the emergency department, the licensed nurse-to-patient ratio shall be 1:2 or fewer critical care patients at all times. A patient in the emergency department shall be considered a critical care patient when the patient meets the criteria for admission to a critical care service area within the hospital.

Only registered nurses shall be assigned to critical trauma patients in the emergency department, and a minimum registered nurse-to-critical trauma patient ratio of 1:1 shall be maintained at all times. A critical trauma patient is a patient who has injuries to an anatomic area that : (1) require life saving interventions, or (2) in conjunction with unstable vital signs, pose an immediate threat to life or limb.

### **(9) STEP DOWN UNIT**

The licensed nurse-to-patient ratio in a step-down unit shall be 1:3 or fewer at all times.

A "step down unit" is defined as a unit which is organized, operated, and maintained to provide for the monitoring and care of patients with moderate or potentially severe physiologic instability requiring technical support but not necessarily artificial life support.

Step-down patients are those patients who require less care than intensive care, but more than that which is available from medical/surgical care.

**"Artificial life support"** is defined as a system that uses medical technology to aid, support, or replace a vital function of the body that has been seriously damaged.

**"Technical support"** is defined as specialized equipment and/or personnel providing for invasive monitoring, telemetry, or mechanical ventilation, for the immediate amelioration or remediation of severe pathology.

### **(10) TELEMETRY**

The licensed nurse-to-patient ratio in a **telemetry** unit shall be **1:4** or fewer **at all times**. **"Telemetry unit"** is defined as a unit organized, operated, and maintained to provide care for and **continuous cardiac monitoring of patients in a stable condition**, having or suspected of having a cardiac condition or a disease requiring the electronic monitoring, recording, retrieval, and display of cardiac electrical signals.

"Telemetry unit" as defined in these regulations does not include fetal monitoring nor fetal surveillance.

### **(11) MEDICAL SURGICAL**

The licensed nurse-to-patient ratio in **medical/surgical care** units shall be **1:5** or fewer **at all times**. A medical/surgical unit is a unit with beds classified as medical/surgical in which patients, who require less care than that which is available in intensive care units, step-down units, or specialty care units receive 24 hour inpatient general medical services, post-surgical services, or both general medical and post-surgical services.

These units may include mixed patient populations of diverse diagnoses and diverse age groups who require care appropriate to a medical/surgical unit.

### **(12) SPECIALITY UNIT**

The licensed nurse-to-patient ratio in a **specialty care unit** shall be **1:4** or fewer **at all times**. A specialty care unit is defined as a unit which is organized, operated, and maintained to provide care for a specific medical condition or a specific patient population.

Services provided in these units are more specialized to meet the needs of patients with the specific condition or disease process than that which is required on medical/surgical units, and is not otherwise covered by subdivision (a).

### **(13) PSYCHIATRIC**

The licensed nurse-to-patient ratio in a *psychiatric* unit shall be 1:6 or fewer at all times. For purposes of psychiatric units only, "licensed nurses" also includes licensed psychiatric technicians in addition to licensed vocational nurses and registered nurses. Licensed vocational nurses, licensed psychiatric technicians, or a combination of both, shall not exceed 50 percent of the licensed nurses on the unit.

### **(14) OTHER UNIT NAMES**

Identifying a unit by a name or term other than those used in this subsection does not affect the requirement to staff at the ratios identified for the level or type of care described in this subsection.

### **(b) PATIENT CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM (Acuity System)**

In addition to the requirements of subsection (a), the hospital shall implement a *patient classification system* as defined in Section 70053.2 above for determining nursing care needs of individual patients that reflects the assessment, made by a registered nurse as specified at subsection 70215(a)(1), of patient requirements and provides for shift-by-shift staffing based on those requirements.

### **RATIO MINIMUM NUMBERS**

The ratios specified in subsection (a) shall constitute the minimum number of registered nurses, licensed vocational nurses, and in the case of psychiatric units, licensed psychiatric technicians, who shall be assigned to direct patient care.

### **UNLICENSED AND ADDITIONAL STAFF**

Additional staff in excess of these prescribed ratios, including non-licensed staff, shall be assigned in accordance with the hospital's documented *patient classification system* for determining nursing care requirements, considering factors that include the severity of the illness, the need for specialized equipment and technology, the complexity of clinical judgment needed to design, implement, and evaluate the patient care plan, the ability for self-care, and the licensure of the personnel required for care.

The system developed by the hospital shall include, but not be limited to, the following elements:

- (1) Individual patient care requirements.
- (2) The patient care delivery system.
- (3) Generally accepted standards of nursing practice, as well as

elements reflective of the unique nature of the hospital's patient population.

**(c)WRITTEN STAFFING PLAN** A written staffing plan shall be developed by the administrator of nursing service or a designee, based on patient care needs determined by the patient classification system. The staffing plan shall be developed and implemented for each patient care unit and shall specify patient care requirements and the staffing levels for registered nurses and other licensed and unlicensed personnel. **In no case shall the staffing level for licensed nurses fall below the requirements of subsection (a).**

The plan shall include the following:

- (1) Staffing requirements as determined by the patient classification system for each unit, documented on a day-to-day, shift-by-shift basis.
- (2) The actual staff and staff mix provided, documented on a day-to-day, shift-by-shift basis.
- (3) The variance between required and actual staffing patterns, documented on a day-to-day, shift-byshift basis.

**(d)RECORD of ACTUAL NURSE ASSIGNMENT FOR EACH PATIENT**

In addition to the documentation required in subsections (c)(1) through (3) above, the hospital shall keep a record of the actual registered nurse, licensed vocational nurse and licensed psychiatric technician assignments to individual patients by licensure category, documented on a day-to-day, shift by- shift basis.

The hospital shall retain:

**(1)STAFFING PLAN**

The staffing plan required in subsections (c)(1) through (3) for the time period between licensing surveys, which includes the Consolidated Accreditation and Licensing Survey process, and

**(2) ACTUAL NURSE**



The record of the actual registered nurse, licensed vocational nurse and licensed psychiatric assignments by licensure category for a minimum of one year.

**(e) ANNUAL REVIEW of PATIENT CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM**

The reliability of the patient classification system for validating staffing requirements shall be reviewed at least annually by a committee appointed by the nursing administrator to determine whether or not the system accurately measures patient care needs.

**(f) REVIEW COMMITTEE**

At least half of the members of the review committee shall be registered nurses who provide direct patient care.

**(g) REVIEW OF PCS**

If the review reveals that adjustments are necessary in the patient classification system in order to assure accuracy in measuring patient care needs, such adjustments must be implemented within thirty (30) days of that determination.

**(h) STAFF INPUT**

Hospitals shall develop and document a process by which all interested staff may provide input about the patient classification system, the system's required revisions, and the overall staffing plan.

**(i) ADMINISTRATOR OF NURSING SERVICES**

The administrator of nursing services shall not be designated to serve as a charge nurse or to have direct patient care responsibility, except as described in subsection (a) above.

**(j) Registered nursing personnel shall:**

- (1) Assist the administrator of nursing service so that supervision of nursing care occurs on a 24-hour basis.
- (2) *Provide direct patient care.*
- (3) Provide clinical supervision and coordination of the care given by licensed vocational nurses and unlicensed nursing personnel.
- (k) Each patient care unit shall have a registered nurse assigned, present and responsible for the patient care in the unit on each shift.
- (l) A rural General Acute Care Hospital as defined in Health and

Safety Code Section 1250(a), may apply for and be granted program flexibility for the requirements of subsection 70217(i) and for the personnel requirements of subsection (j)(1) above.

(m) **Unlicensed personnel** may be utilized as needed to assist with simple nursing procedures, subject to the requirements of competency validation.

Hospital **policies and procedures** shall describe the responsibility of **unlicensed personnel** and limit their duties to tasks that do not require licensure as a registered or vocational nurse.

(n) Nursing personnel from **temporary nursing agencies shall not** be responsible for a patient care unit without having **demonstrated clinical and supervisory competence** as defined by the hospital's standards of staff performance pursuant to the requirements of subsection 70213(c) above.

(o) Hospitals which utilize **temporary nursing agencies** shall have and adhere to a **written procedure to orient and evaluate personnel from these sources**. Such procedures shall require that personnel from temporary nursing agencies be evaluated as often, or more often, than staff employed directly by the hospital.

(p) All registered and licensed vocational nurses utilized in the hospital shall have **current licenses**. A method to document current licensure shall be established

**(q) Plan for routine fluctuations in patient census.**

If a **healthcare emergency** causes a change in the number of patients on a unit, the hospital must demonstrate that prompt efforts were made to maintain required staffing levels.

A healthcare emergency is defined for this purpose as an unpredictable or unavoidable occurrence at unscheduled or unpredictable intervals relating to healthcare delivery requiring immediate medical interventions and care.

NOTE

Authority cited: Sections 1275, 1276.4 and 100275(a), Health and Safety Code. Reference: Sections 1250(a), 1276, 1276.4, 1797.58 and 1790.160, Health and Safety Code.

HISTORY

1. Restoration of text as it existed prior to 11-12-2004 and addition of explanatory Note (Register 2005, No. 33). 2. Editorial correction implementing restoration of text as it existed prior to 11-12-2004 (Register 2005, No. 36).