

SWPONL Fall 2009 News Letter

Federal News

Nurses to Ratify Merger in December

The California Nurses Association, United American Nurses, and Massachusetts Nurses Association announced that they will ratify their planned merger during December. The new 150,000-member union will be called National Nurses United (NNU). NNU plans to advocate for expanding patient rights and RN professional practice, including promoting Senate Bill 1031, the National Nursing Shortage Reform and Patient Advocacy Act, which establishes RN-to-patient safe staffing ratios. The organization states that they work will work to strengthen the voice of nurses in the national health care debate.

White House Announces Funding for Patient Safety Demonstration Projects

The President recently announced a \$25 million demonstration program aimed to assist hospitals and health systems with developing patient safety and medical liability projects. The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) will award grants beginning next year to organizations that seek to reduce preventable injuries, improve communications between patients and physicians, ensure fair timely compensation for medical injuries, and reduce frivolous lawsuits and physician liability premiums. Details for the project grants will be available by October 17.

State News

New EMS Law

Act 37 of 2009, the Emergency Medical Services System Act, is designed to meet current and future emergency care needs by allowing the Department of Health (DOH) to expand the scope of practice of EMS providers and including EMS within the public health system. Provisions of importance to hospitals include the creation of two new types of EMS providers (advanced emergency medical technician and pre-hospital physician extender), the definition of an emergency medical services agency, and a requirement that each EMS agency have a medical director. DOH is in the process of rewriting EMS rules and regulations, and the agency plans an EMS stakeholder meeting in early 2010 to review draft documents.

Pennsylvania State Board

Peer Assistance Program Established for PA Nurses

The **Pennsylvania State Board of Nursing** recently has established the Pennsylvania Nurse Peer Assistance Program (PNAP). This program is dedicated to assisting impaired nurses and nursing students who may be suffering from substance abuse and/or mental illness in their recovery process through early identification, intervention, treatment, and monitoring to ensure their safe return to practice.

Prescription Privileges Granted to Physician Assistants

Final form regulations have been published in the ***Pennsylvania Bulletin*** permitting physician assistants who are practicing under the direction of an osteopathic physician to prescribe drugs in a manner that is similar to the practice of physician assistants under the direction of physicians licensed by the Medical Board. The State Board of Osteopathic Medicine is authorized to promulgate regulations jointly with the State Board of Pharmacy, but has not yet completed the process.

The Joint Commission

Leaderships' Focus on Medical Errors Latest Joint Commission Sentinel Alert Message

The Joint Commission's latest **Sentinel Alert** addresses changes that focus on hospital leadership's responsibilities around medical errors. Ultimately, leadership is held accountable for fixing errors and building a culture of safety within their organizations. The alert recommends leaders support staff members who are involved in a medical error by recognizing that errors are most often the result of system failures, rather than the blame of individuals. The Sentinel Alert lists 14 specific recommendations for leadership to implement in meeting the need to reduce medical errors.

JCR Challenges Hospitals to Increase Health Care Worker Vaccinations

Joint Commission Resources (JCR) created the "Flu Vaccination Challenge" during 2008 to increase health care worker vaccination rates and help decrease the risk of passing the flu onto patients. This year, JCR is again encouraging hospitals across the country to increase flu vaccination rates higher than the national average by sponsoring a new challenge that encourages hospitals to reach a 65, 75, or 90 percent vaccination rate. Health care facilities can register to participate in the challenge at the **Flu Vaccination Challenge Website**. Participating hospitals also can access audioconference downloads, as well as a software program to track employee flu vaccination rates at their facility.

Workforce

Retaining Experienced Nurses

A white paper, "**Wisdom at Work: Retaining Experienced Nurses**," shares the results of research projects conducted during 2007 and 2008 aimed at retaining experienced nurses in hospitals. The study was commissioned by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Outcomes from the study find that a number of health care organizations lowered turnover rates among experienced nurses by making a concerted effort to improve nurse morale and productivity. Successful strategies included innovative approaches to staffing; employee health and wellness programs; and training and development opportunities for veteran nurses. The study also found that ergonomic initiatives, such as teams and equipment to help nurses lift patients and other heavy items, did not contribute to an overall drop in turnover among experienced nurses; however, they did improve morale and cut expenses associated with work-related injuries.

ANA Program Addresses Health and Safety Concerns Among Health Care Workers

The American Nurses Association (ANA) has announced the "**Handle with Care**" program aimed at preventing potentially career-ending injuries among nurses and other front-line caregivers. During the past decade, ergonomic hazards have emerged as a primary health and safety concern among many health care workers. This program seeks to mount a profession-wide effort to prevent back and other musculoskeletal injuries through greater education and training.

Health Careers Week—November 9–13, 2009

The Pennsylvania Center for Health Careers hosts Health Careers Week to raise awareness of the opportunities available for a career in the health care industry. Activities supporting the promotion of health careers include the development of career awareness toolkits, career awareness activities in local schools across the state, the promotion of statewide career expos, and the sponsoring of a statewide contest for students across the commonwealth. These activities are coordinated through the local workforce investment boards across the state. Health Careers Week 2009 is scheduled for November 9–13. This year's Student Health Care Hero Awards will honor Pennsylvania students, in grades 9–12, who are contributing to the health care field through volunteer service or paid, part-time work in a health care setting.