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Fellows Co-Author Study in New England Journal of Medicine: “Nurse Staffing and Inpatient Hospital Mortality.”

Washington, DC (March 21, 2011) – A recent article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* revealed groundbreaking data that speaks to the importance of establishing a nursing workforce that is adequately staffed and structured to lessen workloads and support a patient-centered health care system. The article was co-authored by Fellows Jack Needleman, PhD, and Peter Buerhaus, PhD, RN, FAAN, and V. Shane Pankratz, Cynthia L. Leibson, Susanna R. Stevens, and Marcelline Harris.

The study – based on shift-specific measures, not just annual or monthly averages – analyzed four years of data from a reputable academic medical center and concluded that as patients are exposed to below-target nursing shifts and high-patient turnover, mortality rates increase. The analysis involved 197,961 admissions and 176,696 nursing shifts of eight hours each in 43 hospital units.

Entitled “Nurse Staffing and Inpatient Hospital Mortality,” the article is available to subscribers at <http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMsa1001025>.

Findings from the study reinforce the need to prioritize the establishment of soundly structured nurse-staffing models. It also debunks notions that nurse staffing models do not affect the overall quality of a patient’s well-being. A policy recommendation resulting from the study includes payment incentives for systems to field a staff that is equipped to deliver high-quality care.

“We believe that these findings apply to all hospitals — those like the one we studied, where staffing is generally high and targets are usually met, and hospitals that are less successful in achieving staffing levels needed to meet patient needs and keep them safe,” said Needleman in a UCLA press release. “Every hospital needs to have a system for determining the unit staffing that will keep patients safe and allow the staff to deliver care reliably, and a staffing strategy that will assure those staffing levels are met.”

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