

NURSES TOGETHER: NURSES WORKING IN UNION

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Nurses together: a force for global health

Introduction

- Nurses working in union, with their trade union, can effect major changes which an individual would be unable to achieve alone
- Literature review demonstrates two major changes - *No Lifting Policy* and legislated *Nurse to Patient Ratios*
- These collective actions significantly improved the working lives of nurses, nursing practice and the safety of patients
- These changes occurred in the state of Queensland, Australia circa 2000 and 2016 respectively

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Problem

No Lifting Policy

- 55% of compensatable injuries to health workers were sprain/strain injuries
- Causes – lifting, carrying or putting down another person (1996/97)

Nurse to Patient Ratios

- Excessive workloads increases risks of adverse outcomes for patients

Process

- Union kit of information for members to understand concept of No Lifting Policy; raise issues at work; create working party to devise implementation plan; assess manual handling needs, systems of work, work environment, equipment storage; uniform suitability
- Develop local policy, training, competency and risk assessment
- Union members active in workplace with union officials
- Union active at government and employer levels

- Propose Nurse to Patient Ratios as Health Policy to political parties
- Report current workloads and gather evidence
- Gather information on how ratios decrease risks to patients
- Campaign – training courses, speak to patients, relatives, friends, family
- Wear campaign t-shirts, blitz workplaces, attend rallies
- Contribute to parliamentary enquiries via submission and oral evidence
- Ensure compliance
- Participate in university research pre and post change

Outcome

- Workers' Compensation for patient handling claims ↓ by 95%
- Average cost of claim ↓ by 84%
- Number of patient handling claims ↓ by 70%
- Average days lost per claim ↓ by 81%
- Changes to legislation and approved Codes of Practice for “*Manual Tasks Involving the Handling of People*” and “*Hazardous Manual Tasks*”

- Cost benefit during study to Queensland government of \$70 Million (AUD)
- Additional 167 full time nurses needed = ↓ 1-2 pt/Nr/day; ↓ 1-3 pt/Nr/night shift
- Without ratios, predicted 145 more deaths, 255 readmissions, 29,222 additional hospital days
- Good return on investment, savings were twice the cost of additional staff
- Ratios save lives and save money and improve nursing practice

Discussion

These are two enormous changes with significant benefits for nursing practice, nurses & patients which demonstrate nurses working collectively with their union can achieve changes an individual alone could not attain. Nurses with their union, with shared values, common goals & joint actions can achieve substantial practice changes & group goals. Nurses collectively advocating for nurse safety and patient safety, make a difference to the broader community through improved quality of care & wellbeing of nurses & patients by delivering collective good with ongoing benefits. Celebrate what is achieved working in union.

References

Sinclair, B 2023, *Nurses Working in Union*, viewed 25 May 2023, <https://sinclair.org.au/bern/NursesWorkingInUnion>