

## Use of non-registered nurses as health care providers in the emergency department

### Issue

Nationally, emergency departments have begun to implement alternative staffing options to include the use of non-RN health care providers. Non-RN health care providers may include: licensed practical nurses (LPNs), nursing assistants, emergency department technicians, emergency medical technicians (EMTs), and paramedics. The inclusion of non-RN health care providers within the staffing mix of an emergency department does not promote comprehensive emergency care. There is evidence which supports that a higher ratio of RN staffing is directly related to improved patient outcomes, lower mortality rates, and reduced costs. The impact of the use of non-RN personnel within emergency departments can influence the quality of care, patients' perceptions of satisfaction with care, pain management, preventable complications, patient education, and length of stay. Since research does not exist identifying reliable staffing ratios or staffing formulas which would ensure optimal quality of care, the promotion of alternative staffing options could therefore negatively impact patients in the emergency department.

### NENA position


Emergency departments are increasingly challenged with high complexity, high acuity, high volume of patients within a dynamic environment, which necessitates rapid assessment and intervention by an emergency nurse. All patients seen in the emergency department should be assessed, care initiated and evaluated, and be appropriately educated by a registered emergency nurse.

NENA believes that the provision of emergency care requires the knowledge, expertise, and advanced preparation of registered nurses to ensure optimal quality of patient care. Patients are entitled to receive specialized nursing care including ongoing assessment and treatment by nurses

educated in emergency management. Increasing pressures within emergency departments require appropriately skilled registered nurses. The scope of practice and education of the emergency nurse is directly related to patient outcomes.

NENA believes that budgetary constraints and, at times, limited supply of emergency nurses, should not be used as rationale for inappropriate delegation to non-RN health care providers or substitution of registered professional nurses in the emergency setting.

NENA believes that registered professional nurses are accountable for the quality of care in the emergency department and the delegation of care activities to non-nursing personnel. Patient outcomes and safety are compromised as the number of non-RN health care providers increases.

NENA believes that all patients seen in the emergency department deserve comprehensive, professional care by educated and trained registered nurses. Patients' status change quickly and require the knowledge and skill of a registered emergency nurse to quickly and appropriately assess and intervene. 

### References

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- [www.nursesreconnected.com](http://www.nursesreconnected.com) - a popular site with a large database that assists nurses in locating lost classmates and friends
- <http://nursezone.com/> - the largest community website that is exclusively dedicated to nurses. It is an online community with articles, columns written by experts, international news, updates on the latest in nursing and health care innovations, continuing education, contact hours and links to other sites.
- [www.nurses.com/nurse-zine/](http://www.nurses.com/nurse-zine/) - a site that offers the latest news, product offerings and industry updates. Sign up for the free newsletter that is delivered to your inbox twice per week.
- [www.healthcarecommission.ca](http://www.healthcarecommission.ca) - a series of discussion papers that have been prepared by independent health researchers, experts, and academics with different ideological and philosophical perspectives. Four papers were released on August 2, 2002 with other releases planned for later this year. The results of the commission's research agenda, along with information gathered through the commission's far-reaching and comprehensive program, will provide the groundwork for the commission's final report and recommendations.