

Disclosure law has improved nurse staffing in New Jersey, study finds

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A New Jersey law requiring hospitals and nursing homes to publicly report the number of patients per nurse has led to better nurse staffing ratios, a Rutgers study found.

The study, in the journal *Policy, Politics, & Nursing Practice*, is the first to evaluate the effectiveness of the public reporting requirement. It found that since the law went into effect in 2008, the number of patients per [nurse](#) decreased in 10 of 13 specialty areas of care across New Jersey.

"Nurse staffing, particularly for registered nurses, has been shown to have a direct impact on [patient outcomes](#), such as rates of infection, falls, heart attacks and even death. Insufficient nurse staffing also can affect a patient's length of stay in the [hospital](#)," said lead researcher Pamela de Cordova, an assistant professor at Rutgers School of Nursing. "By reporting and analyzing the data and ensuring that nurses are included in staffing discussions, patient outcomes can be improved."

The legislation requires hospitals to post detailed information about nurse staffing levels, including the number of patients assigned to each staff type, within sight of patients. Hospitals also must submit the information each month to the New Jersey Department of Health, which posts the information online.

New Jersey is one of only five states to require hospitals and nursing homes to report nurse staffing numbers. But de Cordova said many patients are likely unaware of the information or unable to interpret the staffing numbers. She recommends improvements in the data collection process, coupled with [public outreach](#) to inform patients and nurses.

"Publicly available, scientifically validated information can help patients become more informed and empowered when making decisions about their health care and where to obtain it," she

said. "For nurses in New Jersey, being cognizant of this law can also empower them to choose to work in hospitals with the best staffing. Nurses can also become more knowledgeable about existing staffing policies and use that information to advocate for better quality of care for patients."

More information: Pamela B. de Cordova et al, Effects of Public Reporting Legislation of Nurse Staffing: A Trend Analysis, *Policy, Politics, & Nursing Practice* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/1527154419832112](#)

Provided by Rutgers University

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