



**Comments of Joan Wells, RN before the Legislative Committee
on Health Care Subcommittee to Study Staffing of the System
for Delivery of Health Care in Nevada**

My name is Joan Wells, I'm a Registered Nurse at Valley's Medical Surgical Intensive Care Unit and a member of SEIU Local 1107. I've been at Valley hospital for one and half years. I'm here to briefly discuss what turnover means for the nurses who stay, our patients, and our profession, and how staffing ratios could help stop nurses from leaving the bedside and improve patient care.

For the nurses who stay, high turnover means more work. We are expected to precept new nurses and students while we care for the same number of patients. It is hard enough to provide quality care as it is with out this extra responsibility.

The working conditions that lead to high turnover also hurt our profession. When we polled nurses in 2002, 45% of respondents who left the bedside didn't return to work in hospitals. It is no coincidence that the largest percentage, 41.5%, of Nevada's health workforce is employed in offices and clinics and not at the bedside, compared to only 28% nationally.

Lastly, turnover has the greatest impact on our patients. Studies have shown that hospitals with high turnover rates have longer length of stays and higher patient mortality rates. Studies have also shown that turnover costs money. High turnover rates lead to higher average costs per discharge. Furthermore, it is estimated that it costs \$42,000 to \$64,000 to replace a nurse.

Nurses are telling us that minimum nurse to patient ratios will help us to retain nurses and bring others back to the bedside. Where staffing ratios have been tried, they have succeeded, i.e. Australia and Kaiser.

Unfortunately without minimum ratios hospitals are free to set their own standards. In a city dominated by for-profit chains, too often nurses will be required to take additional patients in order to maximize profits.

Because of all these reasons, we recommend minimum nurse to patient ratios. Studies have shown and real life examples have proven that staffing ratios save lives, money, and nurses.

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