

Labor Crisis, Inc.

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Patient-Nurse Ratios Under Discussion

SIDE NOTES:

- **UTMB at Galveston to lay off nearly 4,000 employees**
- **As of 11/26/08, 107 hospitals had laid off 50 or more employees— (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics)**
- **Factors behind layoffs include; rising number of uninsured patients, falling Medicare and Medicaid rates, lower hospital cash reserves and reduced access to credit**
- **The National Nurses Organizing Committee is a branch of the California Nurses Association and the AFL-CIO**



Legislation sponsored by Sen. Jane Nelson (R-Flower Mound) and by Rep. Donna Howard (D-Austin), and supported by the Texas Nurses Association (TNA), was introduced to the Texas legislature on January 14, 2009. This legislation would “*require all hospital governing boards to adopt, implement, and enforce a nurse staffing policy.*”

The proposed legislation is intended to give nurses a stronger voice in hospital governance by requiring nurse staffing committees that would determine nurse staffing levels and monitor variances. There are several unanswered questions:

1. How does a hospital comply with nurse staffing ratios when there is a nationwide shortage of nurses?
2. With an employer-based healthcare system and record-breaking job losses, how would stringent staffing ratios affect hospital revenues and insurance costs?
3. Would some hospitals cut less profitable services to comply with staffing requirements?
4. What would prevent hospitals from “*relocating*” services to “*growth areas*” where job stability and patient revenues are more predictable?

Last month, the National Nurses Organizing Committee (NNOC) met in Florida to propose nurse staffing ratios in support of their organizing efforts across the country. The outcomes of this meeting have serious implications for the Dallas-Fort Worth area, since the nurses unions have already announced their intentions to initiate recruitment.

In January, the CNA sent invitations to registered nurses “*...who want to learn to become union organizers.*” The

CNA is promising “*excellent salary...generous benefits...and family and domestic partner coverage*”.

With hospitals struggling to survive, some registered nurses will consider an offer to recruit for the union versus direct patient care as a tempting alternative with more security.

Hospital Layoffs Mounting

As the economy struggles, hospitals all across the country are laying off staff, including nurses and employed doctors. As of November 2008, the U.S. Department of Labor reported that 107 hospitals had laid off 50 or more employees. Factors affecting layoffs include a rising number of uninsured patients, falling Medicare and Medicaid rates, lower hospital cash reserves, and reduced access to credit from the financial industry. The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston is being forced to lay off 3,800 employees. The hospital reports indicate that if layoffs had not occurred, the hospital would deplete their all of their financial resources within the next three months.

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