

The integral role of nurses in healthcare is most evident in our direct care to patients and our honorific (and historic) title as “the last line of defense.” Currently, there is an alarming pattern of sentinel events plaguing hospitals around the nation. The culprit-- ineffective staffing ratios positioning nurses to choose between quality patient care and the safety of those most vulnerable. Decades of literature by leaders in the field of nursing have determined, without an ounce of doubt, that safe staffing leads to improved healthcare outcomes for patients across all levels of acuity. Medical errors account for the third leading cause of death in the United States. These sentinel events include medication errors, patient falls and hospital-acquired infections. A direct relationship exists between the amount of time a registered nurse spends with a patient and the quality of care that the patient receives.

At The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center, we are privileged to be protected by a union that advocates for safe staffing ratios for registered nurses. While we may count ourselves as lucky, our Nursing Union (and all of the pivotal work they have tirelessly fought for), is in danger with each contract negotiation. Each year our nurses are threatened by hospital administration attempting to withdraw staffing ratios in favor of dangerous working conditions in order to cut costs. Yet, the money is never returned to nurses. It lines the pocketbooks of administrators who are absent amongst their peers and who have never experienced the depths of the conditions in which they have implemented. Yet we, the nurses at the Wexner Medical Center, are the lucky ones. The lucky ones who manage critical care patients on medical-surgical floors because beds are not available. The lucky ones who manage hourly, titrated infusions with three other patients. The lucky ones who juggle clinically decompensating patients while being expected to act as social workers, case managers and advocates.

California and Massachusetts represent two of the best states in healthcare. They are also the only two states with laws mandating safe staffing ratios. Ohio is home to some of the best hospital systems in the world, yet we fall behind in our representation and treatment of registered nurses. If the State of Ohio cared about their citizens as patients, they would care about their nurses. To care for patients is to care for nurses, and without the protection of safe staffing ratios, Ohio will continue to be home to a rise in sentinel events at a cost to the lives of their citizens.

Ryan Davis BSN, RN, Doctor of Nursing Practice Student