

PASADENA STAR-NEWS OPINION

THURSDAY, JANUARY 6, 2005

Put patients first

Re "Governor nursing a bad plan" (Dec. 18):

Has the Star-News simply abandoned its journalist integrity altogether? The editorial, though I'm sure done with the best intention, only continues to perpetuate the CNA's distortion of the facts.

Let's start with the statement that the nursing shortage is no longer an issue. Is the newspaper serious?

The nursing shortage in California and the U.S. is very real; even the experts agree. The four L.A. County-run hospitals alone are about 1,200 RNs short, and L.A. County as a whole still faces a daunting task filling their RN vacancies.

As for the CNA's statement that the "estimated number of nurses needed to meet the ratio has been exceeded seven times over," I for one found that statement rather hard to grasp.

So I did what your editorial board should have done, I called the Board of Registered Nurses (BRN). Last year the BRN issued about 10,000 new RN licenses, which is about the same amount that has been issued in previous years. So one has to wonder how this exceeds anything?

Your support of the CNA's story that the governor is wrong to put the implementation of Phase II of the law on hold is wrong-headed. As an RN with over 30 years of experience I would say that the governor's action is appropriate. Why? Because we need to see what results Phase I has yielded beyond the hospital association and nursing-union hype.

The CNA claims that the mandated ratio is improving patient safety. Tell that to the patients of one L.A.-area hospital (not King/Drew) where CNA nurses purposely reclassify oncology patients so they can be listed as Med/Surg patients, thereby allowing a greater patient-to-nurse ratio than the current law allows.

If the CNA leadership were equally committed to this same goal, they would have never let the Safe Nurse/Patient Ratio bill become law without demanding and then ensuring that there was a strong enforcement provision which the law as it is now lacks.

Better yet instead of spending tons of money on lobbying for a new bill, they could have simply demanded that Title 22 Sec. 70215(a)(1) and 70217(a)(1)(2)(b)(4), which already mandates all hospitals have and use an acuity system and have it regularly enforced.

After all, patients should never become numbers, and the current law does just that. An acuity system assess each individual patient based on their illness and its severity and then assigns the nursing care accordingly — now that's putting patient safety first!

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