Nurse to Patient Ratio
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**PICOT Question:**
In the acute care setting, what is the effect of a higher nurse to patient ratio on quality of care, compared to a lower nurse to patient ratio?

**Case Study:**
Nurse A reports to work in the Med-Surg unit. She is assigned to care for 6 patients over a 12 hour shift. Patient A: Is a 68 year-old male with COPD, admitted with pneumonia, and is considered a high-fall risk. Nurse A spends her shift performing assessments, making hourly rounds, answering call lights, administering medications, advocating for the patients, communicating with doctors, and documenting thoroughly on each one of her patients. Dividing her time among 6 patients leaves her with little time to spend in the patient’s room. She is struggling to meet deadlines and is falling behind on charting.

**Outcome:** Patient A needs to use the restroom, but the last few times it took Nurse A awhile to get to him because she is very busy. He decides to go to the restroom himself and makes it halfway to the restroom before collapsing and breaking his left hip.

**Best Model:** Had the nurse been assigned only 4 patients she would have had more time to assist each individual patient, giving them the care they needed within a timely manner. Patient A would have been receiving a higher quality of care and would not have attempted to get to the bathroom on his own. Therefore, the fall could have been prevented.

**Supporting Evidence:**
- A higher nurse to patient ratio improves many areas of nursing, including the quality of care, adverse events, and the quality of documentation (Zhu, X., et al., 2012).
- Nurses have higher burn out rates and less job satisfaction when they have higher patient ratios (Yu,D., et al, 2015).
- “Nurse staffing ratios have a relationship reductions in hospital-related mortality in most published studies,” (Shekelle, P.G., 2013).
- A study done in several Pennsylvania based hospitals concluded that out of 232,342 surgical discharges, 4,535 of them died within 30 days of hospitalization. “Investigators estimated that the difference between 4:1 and 8:1 patient-nurse ratios,” (Shekelle, P.G., 2013).
- “Increasing the workload of nurses produces worse clinical outcomes for patients, including higher mortality following surgery,” (Aiken, L., 2015).
- “Every one patient added to a nurse’s workload is associated with a 7% increase in deaths following common surgery,” (Aiken, L., 2015)
- To help lighten the load of the RN, some hospitals hire less skilled staff such as nurse aids. “The costs associated with adverse patient outcomes may be higher than the savings of hiring less expensive staff and reduction in nurses;” (Lin, C.H., 2013).

**References:**