

American Nurses Association
8515 Georgia Avenue, Suite 400
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910-3492
Tel (301) 628-5000
Fax (301) 628-5001
www.NursingWorld.org

NEWS RELEASE



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CONTACT:

Adam Sachs, 301-628-5034
adam.sachs@ana.org
www.nursingworld.org

ANA Survey Shows Improved RN Work Environment, Yet More Can Be Done to Promote Safety

SILVER SPRING, MD – Patient lifting equipment and needles with safety devices are more prevalent today than 10 years ago in health care facilities, contributing to a safer overall work environment for registered nurses (RNs), yet more can be done to reduce hazards and promote a workplace culture that prioritizes nurses' health and safety, according to a new American Nurses Association (ANA) survey.

What's clear from the [2011 Health and Safety Survey](#) is that nursing still is tough on the body. And recent U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics figures support the survey's findings about the relatively high risk of harm, ranking nursing fifth of all occupations in work days missed due to occupational injuries and illnesses. ANA's survey shows 80 percent of nurses with neck, back or shoulder pain caused by the job frequently work despite pain. And 13 percent say they had been injured three or more times on the job within a year, compared to 7 percent in 2001.

The survey, which drew responses from 4,614 RNs, reveals the same top three work environment concerns as in a similar 2001 ANA survey: the acute or chronic effects of stress and overwork (74 percent of respondents); disabling musculoskeletal injury (62 percent); and risk of contracting an infectious disease (43 percent).

Creating a healthier, safer workplace is crucial to building and maintaining an adequate nursing workforce, which has suffered from recurring shortages. Several recent studies have shown that dissatisfaction with the nursing work environment — including stressful working conditions leading to burnout, heavy physical demands and difficult work schedules — influences nurses' decisions to leave direct-care nursing. ANA's survey supports these findings, indicating that nearly 6 in 10 nurses agree that health and safety concerns influence their decision to continue practicing in the nursing field.

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Also, recent federal figures show an aging nursing workforce, increasing the vulnerability to injury and forced retirement: the average age of employed RNs is 45.5 and 45 percent is age 50 or older.

“Health care employers must ensure a safe and healthy work environment if they wish to recruit and retain nurses, who are key to the delivery of high-quality patient care,” said ANA President Karen A. Daley, PhD, MPH, RN, FAAN. “Everyone has a role to play in changing the culture to put safety first. No one should have to go to work and worry that they are putting their health in jeopardy given what we know about prevention strategies.”

Nearly two-thirds of nurses say they have ready access to patient lifting and transfer devices, compared to less than half in 2001. ANA’s [Handle With Care®](#) campaign seeks to eliminate manual patient handling to prevent injuries and musculoskeletal disorders. But even though the devices are more available, less than one-third of nurses say they use them frequently, suggesting that selection and placement of patient lift and transfer devices need to be evaluated. Increased education and changes in workplace culture may also help increase safety.

Health care employers have been more accountable in providing safe needle devices, with 96 percent of RN respondents saying they are available, compared to 82 percent in 2001. ANA’s [Safe Needles Save Lives](#) campaign seeks to reduce incidences of needlestick injuries that expose nurses to bloodborne pathogens. But the survey shows that RNs may benefit from a better understanding of their rights under the [Needlestick Safety and Prevention Act](#) (2000), which requires that direct-care professionals participate in identifying and selecting safer needle devices: 62 percent either don’t know if nurses are involved in the selection process, or say they aren’t involved.

Though concerns about [on-the-job physical assault](#) have increased since 2001 (25 percent to 34 percent), the percentage of RNs who say they were assaulted decreased from 17 percent to 11 percent. The majority of nurses still say they have been verbally abused or threatened on the job within a year, though the occurrence decreased since 2001 (57 percent to 52 percent).

Emotional and physical exhaustion can drive nurses from direct care. Overall, the survey shows a trend toward healthier work schedules. The percentage of nurses working more than 40 hours per week decreased from 64 percent to 55 percent, and RNs who work some mandatory or unplanned overtime each month decreased from 68 percent to 53 percent.

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The ANA is the only full-service professional organization representing the interests of the nation's 3.1 million registered nurses through its constituent and state nurses associations and its organizational affiliates. The ANA advances the nursing profession by fostering high standards of nursing practice, promoting the rights of nurses in the workplace, projecting a positive and realistic view of nursing, and by lobbying the Congress and regulatory agencies on health care issues affecting nurses and the public.