

Innovative Nursing Workplace Environment and Staffing Councils throughout New Jersey Hospitals

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(This article is an amended version of the article by Caruso, J.T., Smith, R., Steingall, P., Cholewka, S. & Borenstein, K.K. (2019) Call to action: Nurse workplace environment and staffing councils in New Jersey hospitals. *Nurse Leader*, 17(5), 299-302. It is used with permission by the American Organization of Nurse Leaders.)

The research literature supports that a healthy work environment for nurses is multi-factorial and impacts nurse satisfaction and patient outcomes. Nurses must be provided with an “environment supported by authentic transformational leadership.”¹ The fourth in a series of surveys of acute care and critical care nurses by the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN) reported that their 2018 study provided evidence that implementing the AACN Healthy Work Environment standards made a positive difference in nurse and patient outcomes.²

Organization of Nurse Leaders New Jersey’s Nursing Work Environment and Staffing Council Commission

Under the leadership of the Organization of Nurse Leaders New Jersey (ONL NJ), the Nursing Workplace Environment and Staffing Council Commission was formed. This Commission worked on the development, education, and implementation for hospital-based Nursing Workplace Environment and Staffing Councils (NWESC) throughout New Jersey. The healthcare institution structure for the NWESC begins with co-chair leadership by the Chief Nursing Officer and direct care staff RN. Each council is comprised of more than 51% direct care RNs and supported by other nurse leaders in the organization to address healthy work environment issues. This model of the interplay between leaders and staff demonstrates authentic leadership in developing high performing teams and a commitment to staff

empowerment through active engagement in issues of concern.³

The charter vision guiding the ONL NJ NWESC Commission is that “New Jersey will be recognized as the leader in creating and sustaining a healthy workplace environment for its nurses.” This vision is reflected in each hospital-based NWESC as staff and leadership collaborate to educate all stakeholders on the healthy work environment model, resolving workplace issues and promoting shared governance.

The Conceptual Framework

The innovative approach to the development and implementation of hospital based NWESCs gained statewide momentum as 37 hospitals have joined the initiative since the pilot project in 2017. The conceptual framework is based on the AACN *Standards for Establishing and Sustaining Healthy Work Environments*.⁴

New Jersey Statewide Hospital NWESC Implementation

State-wide interest in the NWESC program continues. Presentations of this important, innovative work were made to numerous stakeholders throughout New Jersey, e.g. New Jersey State Nurses Association leaders, New Jersey Hospital Association (NJHA) Board of Trustees, NJHA government relations officers, and the NJHA Chief Nursing Officers’ Coalition. Currently, there are four active cohorts that include 37 hospitals of which 35 are acute care hospitals and two are specialty hospitals; the 35 acute care hospitals represent 49% of New Jersey’s acute care hospitals and over 19,000 of the state’s RNs are represented. Figure 2 represents NWESC Hospitals by County in New Jersey.⁵ These facilities are a true representation of New Jersey’s healthcare facility complexities comprised of a varied mix of facilities, e.g. small suburban to large intercity systems; Magnet[®] and non-Magnet; union and non union; community and academic medical centers.



Figure 1. Interdependence of Healthy Work Environment, Clinical Excellence and Optimal Patient Outcomes⁴

While each hospital forms and implements their hospital-based NWESC, ONL NJ encourages the development of hospital specific charters consistent with the NWESC Commission charter. When facilities obtain assessment data about their own organization, they are encouraged to utilize the “AACN Healthy Work Environment Assessment Tool” that has been validated for nursing as well as inter-professional use.⁶

Disseminating Information about the NWESC

Improving the nurse work environment is a priority across the United States. Interest is also growing about the New Jersey NWESC project. ONL NJ presented the progress of the NWESC model implementation project throughout New Jersey and across the country, e.g. ONL NJ conferences in 2018 and 2019, Sigma Theta Tau Annual Conference in 2019, AONE Annual Conference in 2019, NYONE Advocacy Conference in 2019.

NWESC HOSPITALS BY COUNTY

ATLANTIC COUNTY

- 1 AtlantiCare – AtlantiCare Regional Medical Center, Atlantic City and Pomona

BERGEN COUNTY

- 13 Valley Health System – The Valley Hospital, Ridgewood

BURLINGTON COUNTY

- 15 Virtua – Virtua Willingboro Hospital, Willingboro
- 17 Virtua Memorial, Mount Holly
- 18 Deborah Heart and Lung Center, Browns Mills
- 21 Virtua Marlton, Marlton

CAMDEN COUNTY

- 25 The Cooper Health System – Cooper University Health Care, Camden
- 26 Jefferson Health New Jersey – Jefferson Cherry Hill Hospital, Cherry Hill
- 27 Jefferson Health New Jersey – Jefferson Stratford Hospital, Stratford
- 28 Virtua – Virtua Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Camden
- 29 Virtua Berlin, Berlin
- 30 Virtua Voorhees, Voorhees

CUMBERLAND COUNTY

- 32 Inspira Health – Inspira Medical Center Vineland, Vineland

GLOUCESTER COUNTY

- 45 Jefferson Health New Jersey – Jefferson Washington Township Hospital, Turnersville

HUDSON COUNTY

- 51 RWJBarnabas Health – Jersey City Medical Center, Jersey City

HUNTERDON COUNTY

- 54 Hunterdon Healthcare System – Hunterdon Medical Center, Flemington

MERCER COUNTY

- 56 Capital Health – Capital Health Regional Medical Center, Trenton
- 57 Capital Health – Capital Health Medical Center Hopewell, Pennington
- 58 RWJBarnabas Health – Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital at Hamilton, Hamilton

MIDDLESEX COUNTY

- 67 Hackensack Meridian Health Raritan Bay Medical Center, Perth Amboy, Perth Amboy
- 70 Saint Peter’s Healthcare System – Saint Peter’s University Hospital, New Brunswick

MONMOUTH COUNTY

- 73 CentraState Healthcare System, Freehold
- 74 Hackensack Meridian Health Jersey Shore University Medical Center, Neptune
- 75 Hackensack Meridian Health Riverview Medical Center, Red Bank
- 76 RWJBarnabas Health – Monmouth Medical Center, Long Branch

MORRIS COUNTY

- 79 Atlantic Health System – Morristown Medical Center, Morristown

OCEAN COUNTY

- 87 Encompass Health Rehabilitation Hospital of Toms River, Toms River
- 89 RWJBarnabas Health – Community Medical Center, Toms River
- 90 RWJBarnabas Health – Monmouth Medical Center Southern Campus, Lakewood

PASSAIC COUNTY

- 94 St. Joseph’s Health – St. Joseph’s Wayne Medical Center, Wayne
- 96 St. Joseph’s Health – St. Joseph’s University Medical Center, Paterson

SALEM COUNTY

- 99 Inspira Health – Inspira Medical Center Elmer, Elmer

SOMERSET COUNTY

- 102 Matheny Medical and Educational Center, Peapack
- 103 RWJBarnabas Health – Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Somerset, Somerville

SUSSEX COUNTY

- 105 Atlantic Health System – Newton Medical Center, Newton

WARREN COUNTY

- 112 Atlantic Health System – Hackettstown Medical Center, Hackettstown

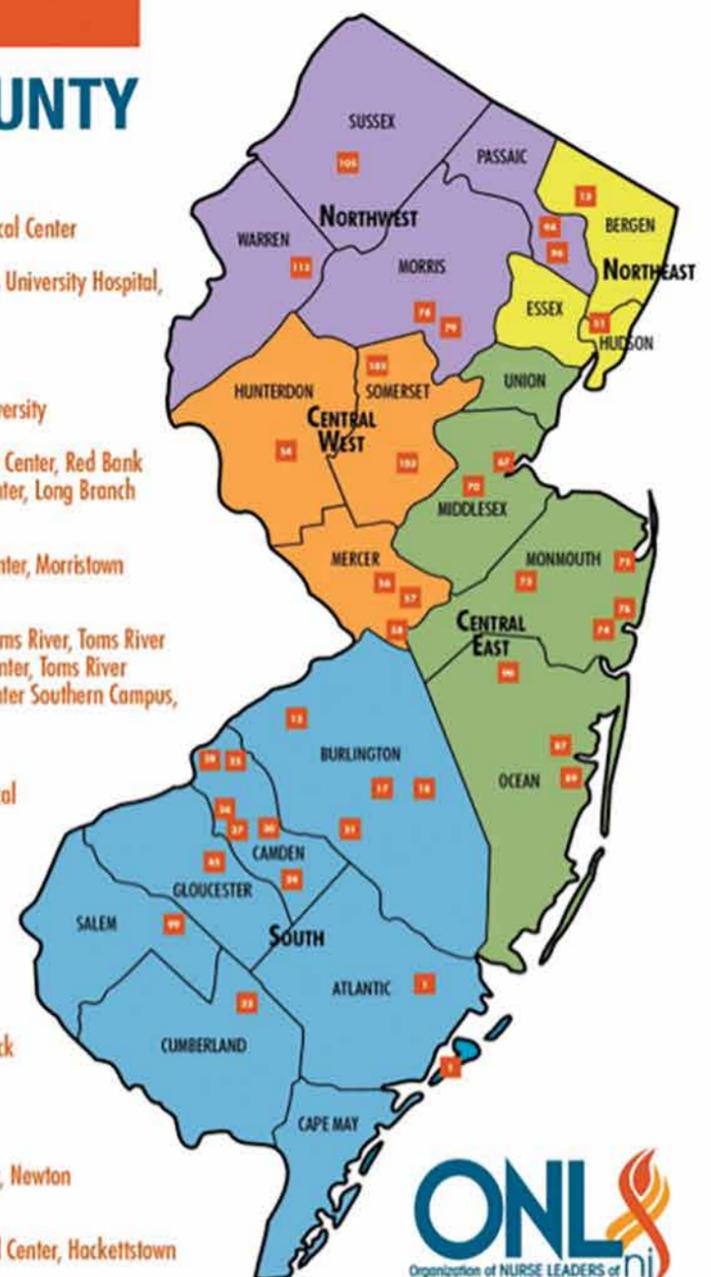


Figure 2: NJ NWESC Hospitals By County⁵

NWESC: An Evidenced-Based Toolkit

An important take-away from the pilot project was the realization that a NWESC toolkit would assist new hospitals embarking on the development of NWESCs by defining structure for the committee and providing a model charter that is consistent with the AACN standards for a healthy work environment. In order to disseminate a consistent process, provide a guideline for the formation of councils, educate members, and lead creative discussions, the NWESC Commission developed a toolkit.

The *Nursing Workplace Environment and Staffing Council: Evidenced Based Toolkit*⁷ was created by the ONL NJ NWESC Commission. This 70-plus page toolkit assists in orientation of new members to their NWESC councils. The toolkit is adaptable to any health care facility that has a goal to develop their own NWESCs. This evidenced-based toolkit is now available through ONL NJ for others who want to take a similar journey. The toolkit provides background on the New Jersey experience and the pilot project based on the AACN Standards for Establishing and Sustaining Healthy Work Environments⁴. The chapter outline follows the six inter-related standards, i.e. authentic leadership, true collaboration, skilled communication, effective decision making, appropriate staffing, and meaningful recognition, with outlines of educational content, discussion points for table top/group discussion and with additional references and appendices of useful resources.

NWESC Feedback from Staff RNs

The direct-care staff RN co-chairs of the hospital-based NWESCs present at each of the educational sessions, discussing the work occurring in their cohort councils and learning sessions. The direct staff RN co-chairs have stated that “We are all in the same place...inspired by the educational sessions and in being part of figuring out how to improve our workplace environment and learn from the initiatives of others.” Regina “Jeanne” Edwards, BSN, RN, CEN a direct-care ED staff RN and co-chair of the NWESC at AtlantiCare Regional Medical Center stated, “It

is empowering as a staff nurse to know our nurse leaders are listening and seeking our collaboration in promoting healthy work environments. The NWESC cohort educational programs were enlightening and great for sharing ideas and networking. Understanding about FTEs and staff budgets was really eye-opening. This NJ initiative with NWESC is exciting.”

The direct-care staff RN feedback as members of the NWESCs indicates that they are exploring staffing options, much like the work reported by other nurse staffing committees⁸ and that this staffing review is better informed by the educational sessions and collaborative staff-senior leader approach.

The NWESC Commission is developing metrics for measuring success that will focus on improvements in reduced turnover, reduced vacancy rate, improved staff engagement and satisfaction.

Sustainability and Metrics for Success

The findings from the recent AACN’s 2018 *Critical Care Nurse Work Environment (HWE) Study: Findings and Implications* demonstrate that the overall nurse work environment has improved, but there is still much work to be done, particularly regarding key issues such as staffing.² In addition, the AACN’s recent study reported that “increased evidence of the relationship between the health of the work environment and patient outcomes intensifies the need to prioritize the improvement of the nurses’ work environment.”² Preliminary research on the nine pilot hospitals indicated an improvement in the standards over a one year period in five of the six standards, i.e. authentic leadership, meaningful recognition, appropriate staffing, effective decision making, and true collaboration. The ONL NJ NWESC Commission is designing a research plan for measuring success that will focus on improvements in reduced turnover, reduced vacancy rate, improved staff engagement and satisfaction and plans to perform research to measure improvements.

Recognizing that nurse staffing and work environments are of national interest as well as interest in New Jersey, nurse leaders and staff nurses

involved in NWESCs have met with state stakeholders and legislators to keep them informed of this pro-nursing innovative work. This innovative initiative in New Jersey will expand to more facilities and focus on creating and maintaining healthy work environments for improved staff and patient outcomes with staff nurse influence from the bedside to the boardroom. For more information, please contact Susan Cholewka, executive director Organization of Nurse Leaders of New Jersey at scholewka@njha.com.

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Why Consider Gerontological Certification

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Did you know that while the US population is getting older and sicker, we are failing to meet the Healthy People 2020 Objective OA-7.3 goal of 10% increase in registered nurses with geriatric certification? In fact, the rate of geriatric certification among registered nurses is falling. In 2004, 1.4% of registered nurses had geriatric certification. The most recent available data (2013) shows only 0.5% of nurses had geriatric certification. According to the 2010 census, 16.1% of New Jersey residents are over 65 years of age. Across the US, older adults account for about 40% of hospital admissions.

Nurses who work in long term care and on elder care units certainly take care of patients over age 65 but so do nurses who work in many other settings. In fact, nurses who work in acute care may find that most of their patients are over the age of 65. These patients need nurses skilled in caring for their multiple and complex issues. For instance, polypharmacy, multiple physician consultants and vital organs that no longer work optimally. Goals of care conversations should not only be left to clinicians consulted just for that purpose but can be supported by education from trusted nurses at the bedside or in case management.

A fantastic (and free) resource to improve your expertise in caring for these vulnerable patients is <https://consultgeri.org/>, a clinical website of the Hartford

Institute for Geriatric Nursing (HIGN). Do you work in the OR, at a surgi-center, on med-surg, on a PACU or in a rehab facility? Think about your last shift and the demographics of your patients. How many of them were over age 65? According to Association of periOperative Registered Nurses (AORN), 55% of all operative procedures are performed on older adults. These older adults have increased risk for injury and adverse postoperative effects including urinary retention, delirium, and falls. ConsultGeri has tools which can help improve outcomes for these patients including “Perioperative Assessment of the Older Adult,” “Nursing Standard of Practice Protocol: Delirium,” and “Nursing Standard of Practice Protocol: Transitional Care.”

Unless you work in pediatrics or maternal health, chances are that you are a nurse who mostly sees older adults as patients. So please consider gerontological certification with American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC). For more information, visit <https://www.nursingworld.org/our-certifications/gerontological-nurse/>. ANCC certifications in gerontology are also available for Advanced Practice Nurses and Clinical Nurse Specialists. If you work fulltime taking care of adult patients, you will easily meet the clinical practice hourly requirements for eligibility and American Nurses Association (ANA) offers an interactive review course which meets most of the contact hour requirement. I took my certification exam in 2015 and am currently preparing for my renewal. If you have any questions about process, please email me summer.valenti@gmail.com.

