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Nurses' and Patients' Appraisals Show Patient Safety in Hospitals Remains a Concern

Abstract

In the report *To Err is Human* (1999), the National Academy of Medicine called for national action to improve patient safety in hospitals. The report concluded that improving nurse work environments—assuring adequate nurse staffing and supporting nurses' ability to care for patients—was critical to these efforts. Two decades later, have nurse work environments improved, and has that had a noticeable impact on patient safety? To find out, a research team led by LDI Senior Fellow [Linda Aiken, PhD, RN](#) surveyed more than 800,000 patients and 53,000 nurses in 535 hospitals in 2005, and again in 2016.

Keywords

Nursing, patient safety, work environment

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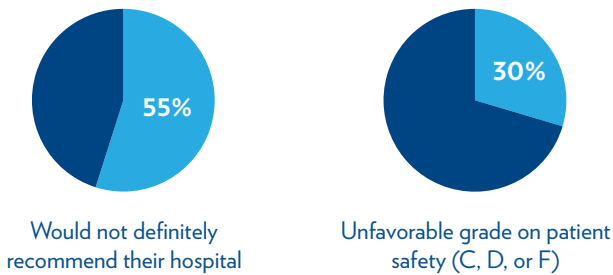
Linda H. Aiken, Douglas M. Sloane, Hilary Barnes, Jeannie Cimiotti, Olga F. Jarrín, and Matthew D. McHugh

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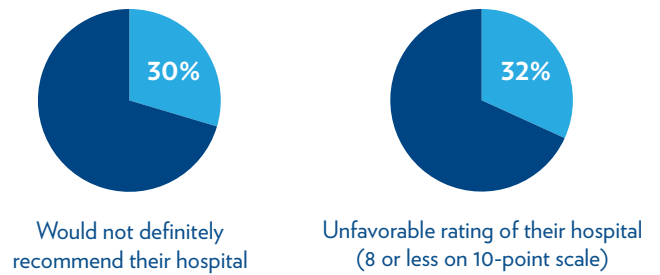
In the report *To Err is Human* (1999), the National Academy of Medicine called for national action to improve patient safety in hospitals. The report concluded that improving nurse work environments—assuring adequate nurse staffing and supporting nurses' ability to care for patients—was critical to these efforts. Two decades later, have nurse work environments improved, and has that had a noticeable impact on patient safety? To find out, researchers surveyed more than 800,000 patients and 53,000 nurses in 535 hospitals in 2005, and again in 2016.

1. Hospital nurses and patients report ongoing concerns about safety and quality in 2015-2016

Nurse Reports of Quality of Care and Patient Safety, 2015-2016



Patient Reports of Hospital Experience, 2015



2. Did nurses report that work environments changed from 2005 to 2016?



3. In hospitals that improved their work environment, nurses and patients report:

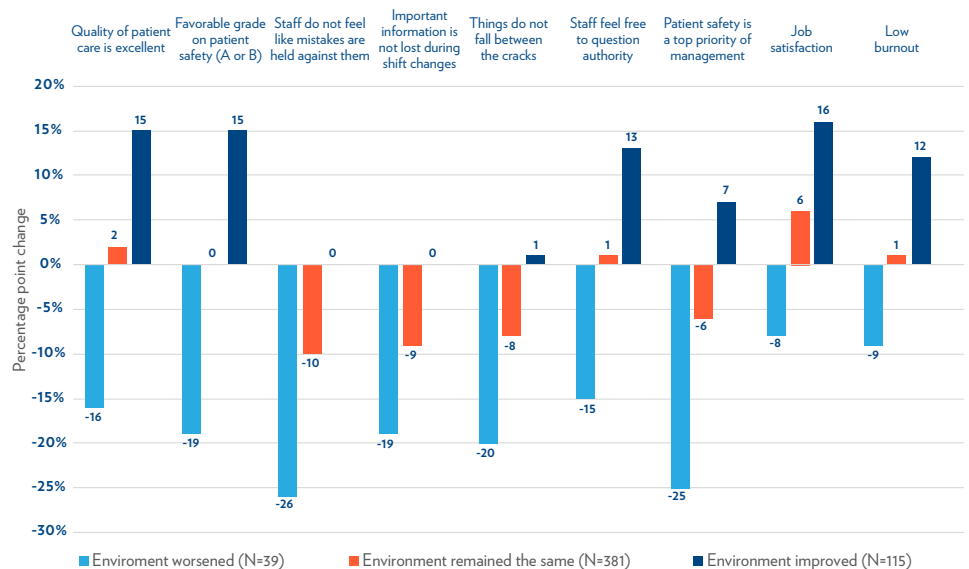
Nurses

- ▶ 15-percentage point increase in nurses giving hospitals high patient safety grades
- ▶ 15-percentage point increase in nurses reporting excellent quality of care

Patients

- ▶ 8-percentage point increase in patients that would definitely recommend their hospital
- ▶ 11-percentage point increase in patients giving hospitals a favorable rating

Changes in Nurse Reports of Patient Safety and Related Measures, 2005 and 2016



Conclusion

Failure to improve clinical work environments may impede progress on patient safety. Incentives are needed to reward hospitals for improvements linked to patient safety, such as providing greater autonomy to nurses to make timely decisions on behalf of patients, and promoting leadership that is committed to a culture of continuous quality and safety improvement.