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Getting our priorities straight: A case for shifting resources to improve patient outcomes

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Statement of the problem: The United States' spending on healthcare is exponentially greater than any other country in the world. Salaries for administrative workers are a major factor in skyrocketing national healthcare spending with salaries for hospital CEOs increasing 93% over the past decade. Despite spending more on health care than any other industrialized nation, Americans experience poorer outcomes. While increased spending on CEO salaries has not translated into improved patient safety, there is a growing body of evidence recognizing the value of nurse staffing in achieving better outcomes. Despite the evidence, organizations continue to cut nurse staffing to increase productivity. These reductions place an undue burden on remaining nurses as they struggle to do more with fewer personnel and other resources. With the increased occupational stress, nurses are suffering burnout at rates that have been described in the literature as epidemic.

The purpose of this presentation is to bring attention to the impact of burnout on healthcare outcomes and spending. Burnout is demonstrated to have a direct impact on patient care, negatively affecting safety as stress leads to a greater number of errors made by nurses. A study out of John's Hopkins concluded that health care errors are likely the third leading cause of death in the United States. Further compounding these negative health outcomes, burnout is associated with increased rates of occupational injury and illness in nurses, resulting in increased absenteeism, workers compensation expenditures and associated costs. Conclusions: excessive healthcare spending can be mitigated by improved nurse staffing as set forth in guidelines established by the American Nurses Association. Recommendations are made for a shift in resources from administrative spending to enhanced nurse staffing as a sustainable solution for burnout and improved patient outcomes and is achievable without detrimental impact to overall profitability.

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