

Nursing Practice & Patient Advocacy Alert

Charge Nurse Providing Meals/Break Relief

This Nursing Practice and Patient Advocacy Alert clarifies the role of the Charge Nurse with respect to providing meals/breaks and other relief.

Title 22, Section 70217 (a), Nursing Service Staff, states that only licensed nurses providing direct patient care shall be included in the ratios.

This Section further states that Nurse Administrators, Nurse Supervisors, Nurse Managers, and Charge Nurses who have demonstrated current competence to the hospital in providing care on a particular unit **may** relieve licensed nurses during breaks, meals, and other routine, expected absences from the unit. **When a Nurse Administrator, Nurse Supervisor, Nurse Manager, Charge Nurse or other licensed nurse is engaged in activities other than direct patient care, that nurse shall not be included in the ratio/count.**

BREAK RELIEF IS TAKING OVER AN ASSIGNMENT.

The primary duty of the Charge Nurse is to provide indirect patient care. Charge Nurses coordinate all unit activities such as the work flow; facilitate patient admissions, discharges and transfers; monitor unit processes and outcomes; arbitrate conflicts; including numerous other indirect patient care activities. Furthermore, the Charge Nurse acts as an expert resource person to all nursing staff and act as a liaison to all other disciplines and departments.

The Department of Public Health (DPH) requires that when a nurse takes a break during a shift, the hospital must reassign the nurse's patients to another nurse. This means that the break relief RN must get report before taking over the assignment and give report back when handing over the patients to the returning RN.

Title 22, Section 70215, Planning and Implementing Patient Care, further requires that the assigned RN shall directly provide ongoing assessments and all other elements of the nursing process, such as, interventions, evaluation and patient advocacy.

When a Charge Nurse is acting as a break relief nurse she/he must be present and available to continue the care of the reassigned patients as required by this Section. Clearly, when providing break relief the Charge Nurse is not relieved from performing Charge Nurse duties. In this instance, there can be no conflict between attending to the needs of the reassigned patients under her/his break relief duties, and the duties of the Charge Nurse.

Therefore, as a patient advocate, it is against the exclusive interest of the patient to require the Charge Nurse to fulfill both roles simultaneously.