Position Statement 2
American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses

A Position Statement on “On Call/Work Schedule”

The American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses (ASPAN) has the responsibility for defining the practice of perianesthesia nursing. An integral part of this responsibility is to promote safe, appropriate patient care following anesthesia. ASPAN sets forth this position statement to safeguard the delivery of postanesthesia care for all patients at all times.

Background

ASPAN receives numerous inquiries from perianesthesia nurses regarding care delivery during “on call” hours. The 1998-1999 ASPAN Standards and Guidelines Committee conducted a review of literature and a descriptive telephone survey to identify issues pertinent to “on call” scheduling and staffing. A recent review of literature and an ASPAN member survey confirmed that perianesthesia nurses continue to face many of the same challenges as those described in 1999.

The following bullets summarize the results of a survey regarding on call practices that was sent to ASPAN members in the summer of 2013. 2,041 members responded.

- Do PACU/Phase I nurses take call? 94.4% replied yes
- Do PREOP/Phase II nurses take call? 41.5% replied yes
- How frequently are nurses on call? 73.1% replied ‘weekly’, 18.7% replied ‘monthly’
- When asked, what is the maximum duration of the ‘on call’ period, 37.4% replied 12 hours, 31.1% replied 24 hours
- Do you have a mandatory rest period following call? Only 17.5% replied affirmatively
- Do you have a designated place to take a sleep break on the premises? Only 20.8% replied affirmatively
- Do you have scheduled night shift staff? Only 30.9% replied affirmatively
- Do you have scheduled weekend staff? Only 32% replied affirmatively
- 69.6% replied affirmatively to following ASPAN standards for staffing 24/7

1. ASPAN recommended guidelines for staffing ratios are not maintained during “on call” hours.
2. Longer and/or more frequent “on call” hours are being required.
3. Increased patient acuity is requiring increasingly complex levels of care.
4. The number of patients recovered during the “on call” hours is increasing.
5. There is insufficient time after “on call” hours for the perianesthesia nurse to rest prior to returning to a scheduled work shift in the PACU.
6. There is a lack of physical space designated within the facility for on call staff to rest.
7. Staffing budgets often do not reflect “on call” hours and do not identify the potential need for additional staff should the “on call” staff require rest.
8. The PACU functions as an overflow unit for ICU and Medical/Surgical patients, often requiring nurses to work all night and return to work a regularly scheduled shift without sufficient rest.

Many perianesthesia nurses work “on call” hours in addition to regularly scheduled hours. These “on call” hours typically involve coverage during the night, on weekends, on holidays and during high
census/bed shortage situations. Institutions are responsible for providing patients a safe environment. Although some states have laws prohibiting mandatory overtime for nurses, many specifically exclude “on call” hours in the definition of mandatory overtime.

Many professional nursing organizations recognize and address the issue of nurse fatigue. The Association of periOperative Registered Nurses (AORN) created a position statement regarding on call concerns and strategies. The American Nurses Association (ANA) addressed mandatory overtime, resulting nurse fatigue and risks to patient safety and quality of care. The Joint Commission identified a link between fatigue and patient safety as well as proposed strategies developed to address nursing fatigue and patient safety.

According to the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, fatigue constitutes an unsafe condition. According to research studies, the medical error rate tripled after workers performed 12.5 hours of sustained activity. Other studies suggest a correlation between sleep deprivation, fatigue and negative effects on memory, language/numeric skills, visual attention and concentration. In addition to creating a risk to patient safety, sleep deprived, fatigued people are at increased risk for personal injury on duty and when driving home after an extended work day. The Institute of Medicine recommends a rest period of five hours of uninterrupted sleep for duty periods exceeding 16 hours.

Position

It is, therefore, the position of ASPAN that when it is necessary to assign “on call” hours, the following strategies should be considered:

1. The number and length of “on call” shifts should be coordinated with the number of sustained work hours and provide for adequate recuperation periods.

2. Staffing is provided in accordance with ASPAN’s Perianesthesia Nursing Standards, Practice Recommendations and Interpretive Statements.

3. Minimum staffing ratios are maintained per ASPAN Standards. “A minimum of two RNs should be present in the PACU whenever a Phase I patient is being recovered. At least one of the two RNs should be competent in Phase I level of care. These staffing recommendations should be maintained during “on call” situations.” (See Practice Recommendation 1.)

4. There is a plan in place to augment “on call” staff based upon patient census and acuity.

5. There is a plan in place to “relieve” the “on call” nurse in the event that the manager and/or nurse determines that there is potential for compromise in the delivery of safe, competent care without fear of reprisal or disciplinary action.
6. Educate staff about the effects of fatigue on patient safety and the need for good sleep habits.\(^8\)
   a. Practice pre-sleep relaxation
   b. Avoid food, alcohol or stimulants prior to sleep

7. Create and implement a fatigue management plan to include strategies to minimize fatigue.\(^21,22\)
   a. Engaging in conversations with others
   b. Engaging in physical activity
   c. Strategic caffeine consumption
   d. Taking short naps when possible

**Expected Outcomes**

Perianesthesia nurses will familiarize themselves with this position statement and inform and educate peers, nurse managers and administrators.

Management and staff will collaborate in the development of guidelines to provide the delivery of safe, competent care during “on call” and normal work hours.

ASPN, as the voice of perianesthesia nursing practice, will share this position statement with regulatory agencies and professional organizations that interface with units providing perianesthesia care.

**Approval of Statement**

This statement was recommended by a vote of the ASPAN Board of Directors on April 16, 1999 and approved by a vote of the ASPAN Representative Assembly on April 18, 1999 in Honolulu, Hawaii.

This position statement was updated and revised at the October 2015 meeting of the Standards and Guidelines Strategic Work Team in Fort Worth, Texas.

**REFERENCES**


BIBLIOGRAPHY


Surani S, Murphy J. Sleepy nurses: are we willing to accept the challenge today? Nurs Admin Q. 2007;31(2):146-150.
