

Emergency Nurses Association

Public Policy Agenda: 2016/2017

I. Safety in the Emergency Care Environment

Reduce Violence Against Emergency Nurses

Violence in emergency departments has reached epidemic levels and emergency nurses are particularly vulnerable. The 24-hour accessibility of the emergency department, the lack of adequately trained, armed or visible security guards, and an overall stressful environment are among the chief reasons why emergency nurses are victims of violence at such a high rate.

The Emergency Nurses Association (ENA) will continue to advocate for laws that strengthen the criminal penalties for assaulting or battering emergency nurses and other health care workers in emergency departments.

Reduce Workplace Injury

Nurses are at risk of harm from the environment in which they work. Factors influencing this situation include ergonomic injuries, needle stick injuries, increasing morbid obesity levels, and an aging workforce.

ENA will support federal legislation and programs aimed at reducing workplace injuries and illnesses for health care personnel and patients, while improving the safety of patient care delivery.

Establish Safe Emergency Department Staffing Guidelines

Maintaining the appropriate level of emergency nurse staff is critical to the ability of emergency departments to provide quality healthcare for patients.

As such, ENA supports policies that empower nurses to create appropriate staffing plans specific to each emergency department. This approach recognizes the many factors that determine the appropriate level of staffing, as well as the flexibility needed to account for changing circumstances in emergency departments.

II. Nursing Education and Practice

Increase Funding for Nursing Education and Training

ENA urges Congress to increase its investment to alleviate the growing nursing shortage that is impacting every aspect of the U.S. healthcare system and negatively affecting patient care.

ENA will support legislation that reauthorizes and funds the Nursing Workforce Development programs under Title VIII of the Public Health Service Act. The Title VIII programs provide the main federal funding for nursing education, practice, and retention.

Protect and Recognize Emergency Nursing Scope of Practice

ENA will support public policies that remove restriction on the role and scope of practice of RNs and advance practice registered nurses (APRNs) in appropriate healthcare settings.

ENA will support legislation that allows APRNs to practice autonomously, and independently prescribe medication, and oppose restrictions on administering procedural sedation medications by qualified emergency department nurses. In addition, ENA will support legislation that recognizes APRNs as full practice providers in the Veterans Administration's health care system.

III. Quality and Timely Access to Emergency Care

Support Programs to Enhance Access and Improve Care for Mental Health Patients

ENA will support federal government initiatives aimed at enhancing access and improving care for mental health patients. Further, ENA supports policies that alleviate the holding or boarding of such patients in the emergency department.

ENA will support comprehensive mental health reform legislation, including bills that improve Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement for mental health services and enhance community-based resources for the mentally ill.

Increase support for trauma systems and trauma centers

Trauma is the leading cause of death for people ages 1-44, and 35 million people are treated for traumatic injuries every year. Nevertheless, more than 45 million people lack access within one hour to a trauma center able to treat severe traumatic injuries.

ENA will continue to fight for legislation and funding to improve the trauma care in the U.S. This includes both the development of optimally functioning trauma systems and quick access to state-of-the-art trauma centers.

Maintain funding for poison control centers

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 40,000 people die annually from poisoning and approximately 2,000 are treated each day in emergency departments.

ENA will support programs and funding that provide resources for the nation's 56 poison control centers.

Improve treatment of patients who abuse prescription opioids and heroin

The U.S. is experiencing a historic epidemic in opioids and heroin abuse. In 2014, drug overdoses were the leading cause of accidental death in the U.S.

ENA will support comprehensive legislation to combat the ongoing national crisis of addiction to opioid drugs, including provisions to encourage states and local communities to pursue a full array of proven strategies to combat addiction and support individuals in recovery.

Fund Research to Improve the Delivery of Emergency Care

ENA will continue to strive for improved patient safety and enhanced quality of care by collaborating with appropriate stakeholders to promote and conduct research to enhance emergency care for all patients.

ENA was a strong advocate of the establishment in 2012 of the Office of Emergency Care Research (OECR) at the National Institutes of Health. The Office is a focal point for basic and clinical research on emergency care across NIH. ENA will continue to support the research initiatives and innovations fostered by OECR.

In addition, ENA will support the work of the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR) at the National Institutes of Health and urges adequate federal funding for NINR within the overall NIH budget.

Continue and expand federal research and support for pediatric emergency care

ENA will strongly support policies that will enhance emergency medical services for children. As such, ENA urges Congress to continue to support the Emergency Medical Services for Children (EMSC) program at the Health Resources and Service Administration. EMSC, which has provided funds to every state, is the only federal program dedicated to improving emergency care for children.

ENA will support legislation that reauthorizes and provides adequate federal funding for the EMSC program.