



January 27, 2015

Professional Distinction

Personal Dignity

Patient Advocacy

Representative Dean, Chair
Health and Human Services Finance Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155

Dear Representative Dean and Committee Members,

On behalf of more than 20,000 Registered Nurses working at the bedside who are represented by the Minnesota Nurses Association (MNA), I am writing today to urge you to consider uniform standards and protocols that all hospitals must follow to safely protect patients, healthcare workers, and the public when confronting infectious diseases including Ebola, MERS, the Norovirus, and influenza.

While the Minnesota Department of Health has worked extensively with the Minnesota Hospital Association to provide guidance on how to appropriately handle patients presenting with infectious diseases, no hospital in Minnesota is actually required to follow this protocol-even for Ebola. We continue to hear reports from nurses in hospitals across Minnesota informing us of vastly different equipment, training, and staffing standards for suspected cases of infectious disease.

Many hospitals have not purchased basic protective equipment, which exposes nurses and healthcare professionals to potential diseases and, in turn, potentially exposes nurses' families and contacts after they leave the hospital. Others have denied nurses in non-emergency room units sufficient training regarding the proper handling of patients demonstrating suspicious symptoms in their units. Perhaps most alarming, MNA takes calls from panicked nurses who say training exercises failed to actually train nurses, but their facility refuses to schedule another drill due to time and budgetary constraints.

As we hear anecdotes of each hospital in Minnesota preparing for infectious disease outbreak in drastically different ways, we know it is impossible to keep patients and healthcare workers safe when we are doing it on a hospital-by-hospital basis.

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Every healthcare employer must follow the Precautionary Principle and institute optimal protocols and personal protective equipment for Ebola that meets the highest standards including:

- Full-body hazmat suits that meet the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) F1670 standard for blood penetration, the ASTM F1671 standard for viral penetration which leaves no skin exposed or unprotected
- National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health-approved powered air purifying respirators with an assigned protection factor of at least 50 — or a higher standard as appropriate
- At least two direct-care Registered Nurses caring for each Ebola patient with additional RNs assigned as needed (based on the direct care RNs professional judgment), with no additional patient care assignments.
- Continuous interactive training with the RNs who are exposed to patients; continuous, updated training and education for all RNs that is responsive to the changing nature of these diseases; and continuous, interactive training and expertise from facilities where state-of-the-art disease containment occurs.

The bottom line is that our state is not as prepared as it should be for treating a potential case of Ebola or for preventing the spread of any number of communicable diseases. We are grateful to you for discussing today Minnesota's preparedness for treating any potential case of Ebola that may arise as a result of the terrible outbreak in West Africa. Nurses in Minnesota stand with nurses and other medical professionals throughout the world. We all face the threat of infection every day during the routine work of saving patients' lives. We never know where a symptomatic patient will appear to seek care.

We ask you to stand with us and ask for the uniform and optimal levels of protection. We support additional funding to support MDH efforts to address Ebola and other communicable disease preparedness, and we encourage the State to apply those funds consistently by requiring Minnesota hospitals to follow uniform standards and protocols.

Please consider uniform standards and protocols that all hospitals must follow to safely protect patients, healthcare workers and the public when dealing with infectious diseases such as Ebola.

Sincerely,



Linda Hamilton, RN, BSN
President
Minnesota Nurses Association