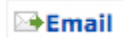


# Understaffing of Nurses Leading to 1000s of Patient Deaths

By [AFL-CIO](#), America's Union Movement - June 17, 2009



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The nation's crisis in patient care stems from routine understaffing of registered nurses in hospitals—and that understaffing, say nurses [unions](#), leads to thousands of unnecessary patient deaths a year.

In a move to raise public awareness and build support for national safe staffing level standards, the nation's three major nurses unions have launched a new TV and online advertising campaign. The campaign coincides with the debut of "HawthoRNe," one of the new TV shows debuting this season that features nurse characters.

The ad from the California Nurses Association/National Nurses Organizing Committee (CNA/NNOC), United American Nurses (UAN) and Massachusetts Nurses Association (MNA) asks viewers to imagine a world without nurses.

When nurses disappear, so does patient safety...If you've ever been a patient or will be one in the future, insist on safe staffing levels—because it's our registered nurses who put the care in [health care](#).

Earlier this year, the three [nursing](#) organizations announced the formation of a national union of RNs by combining the strength of their 150,000 members, the United American Nurses—National Nurses Organizing Committee. The ad features direct-care nurses from all three unions.

Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) recently introduced the National Nursing Shortage and Patient Advocacy Reform Act (S. 1031), to guarantee safe staffing in hospitals across the nation, as well as to give nurses whistle-blower and patient advocacy protections. UAN President Ann Converso, RN says the legislation provides

concrete solutions to the nurse staffing crisis on the table. We must make safe RN staffing ratios [the law](#) of the land; anything less puts our patients at risk.

Along with reaching out to the public, the ad asks viewers, especially nurses, to visit a new

website, [www.RNvoices.net](http://www.RNvoices.net), where nurses will be asked to offer their opinions of the show, which will be forwarded to the appropriate producers. The website will update RNs on the key legislative issues, such as the new federal patient safety bill establishing safe nurse staffing in hospitals.

Deborah Burger, RN, co-president of CNA/NNOC, says she welcomes the portrayal of nurses in prime-time [entertainment](#) and if the shows draw from real-life nursing situations, they can offer a good look into the daily problems nurses face in providing quality care.

We know these shows are Hollywood entertainment....Will these shows reflect the struggle of nurses to care for their patients in the face of heartless insurance and hospital bureaucracy? Will they reflect the terrible burden of being overloaded with too many patients who are too sick? We look forward to finding out.

Says MNA President Beth Piknick, RN:

As patient advocates, we have to take this opportunity of these new television shows to press our agenda of safe staffing. Nurses have seen too many patients suffer unnecessarily because of the crisis in care caused by hospital understaffing. We are delighted for the chance to make this connection for our fellow nurses and the public.