

## **Letter: BMC medical staff makes case for 'No' vote on Q1 – Berkshire Eagle, October 4, 2018**

To the editor:

Safe medical care depends on the composition and teamwork of multidisciplinary teams with the right balance of doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and support staff. No one discipline can create patient safety by mandating that their discipline functions in isolation and in a certain quantity. Safety always occurs because of the team.

As the leadership of the Berkshire Medical Center medical staff, we need to express our grave concerns regarding the consequences of ballot Question 1 were it to pass. Question 1 will impact the teams of health care professionals who work at the hospital. It will also have a negative impact on access to care and provision of care in the hospital.

As recognized by many nationwide organizations, the teams of health care professionals at Berkshire Medical Center have a demonstrated track record of providing excellent medical care to our community. Question 1 mandates the adoption of rigid registered nurse-to-patient staffing ratios for all hospitals in Massachusetts. If passed, this ballot initiative will have a disruptive effect on the composition of the care teams at BMC.

It will also unavoidably have a negative impact on access to acute care hospital services in the Berkshires. Rather than adjusting the composition of the care teams to meet the needs of patients who come to BMC, the hospital will need to adhere to the government-mandated registered nurse-to-patient ratio assignments as they admit and care for patients.

Our geographic location places a particular responsibility on BMC and its staff to meet the health care needs of our community. This ballot initiative will force BMC and its medical staff to face a very stark future reality. Per the ballot initiative, if at any time BMC cannot guarantee that the mandated RN-to-patient ratios are being met, patients will have to wait for care, be held in the ER rather than be admitted to the hospital or will potentially need to be transferred to another hospital if the required ratios cannot be met at BMC. Those hospitals, even if they can accept those patients themselves, are located at quite a distance from our community. How does any of this improve patient care and safety?

Aside from the challenge recruiting and retaining the additional RN staff to meet this mandate would pose or the financial penalties that would hit the hospital if the mandates were not met, it is the impact on our ability to provide care for our patients that is the most frightening aspect of this misguided ballot initiative.

If the voters of Berkshire County want their community hospital to be there for them when they need it, they should vote "No" on Question 1.

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