

Letter: Question 1 offers no benefits, genuine harm – Berkshire Eagle, October 22, 2018

To the editor:

Imagine you are sitting with your health care provider trying to make a critical decision about the health care that you and your family rely upon — in this case, Ballot Question 1.

You ask your provider, "Please tell me the potential benefits of this treatment, the potential harms and what it will cost."

Your provider states, "On the benefit side, there is no evidence of improved quality of care or safety." She states, "In California, many years of experience in fixed nurse staffing ratios have provided no systematic improvement in quality and safety. Without the kind of rigid ratios that Ballot Question 1 requires, Massachusetts currently outperforms California on almost every quality and safety measure. In addition, a recent article in *Critical Care Medicine* found no improvement in safety in Massachusetts after state-mandated intensive care unit ratios were imposed in 2014."

You then ask, "Well, what about harm?" She states, "The potential harm is clear. To impose government-mandated staffing ratios would adversely impact timeliness of treatment in our emergency rooms, interfere with transfer of patients in need of specialized services such as treatment of heart attack and force delays in admission to the hospital. In addition, thoughtful input from leaders and providers in behavioral health, our Community Health Programs (CHP) and the Brien Center clearly demonstrates that mandated nursing ratios will make it far more difficult for them to find and retain nurses and to continue the services that you and your family depend upon."

You then ask, "What about the cost?" She states, "The Healthcare Policy Commission (a neutral arbiter of cost and quality for the state) says that the cost would be at least \$676 - \$949 million per year, even without including costs to emergency departments and other major areas of the hospital. Berkshire Medical Center estimates that its costs will be \$22.4 million each and every year and Fairview Hospital expects an additional \$1.4 million in annual costs."

Your provider then asks you to summarize this information and you state, "There will be no benefit, there will be significant harm and there will be costs that would threaten my hospital and my family's health." Your decision is now clear: You must say "No" on Ballot Question 1.

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