

Berkshire Edge – September 30, 2018

To the Editor:

Several recent letters promoting a yes vote on Q#1 focused on the easy bogeyman of CEO pay and the recent strike by nurses at BHS. But let's get beyond these and really look at the facts.

If Q#1 is not defeated:

- MA laws on health care delivery in hospitals will dramatically change on 1/1/19 – less than 60 days after voting.
- Every hospital – including Fairview Hospital – will have to follow these new laws.
- A Registered Nurse will now determine the level of nursing care you need and receive – not your doctor, not the hospital, not your family.
- Mandatory, one size fits all, RN to patient staffing ratios will be imposed on every patient care department, including emergency, maternity, and surgical.
- Q#1 provisions will automatically become part of all relevant collective bargaining contracts at their expiration dates.
- Hospital fines of up to \$25,000 for any and each incorrect staffing ratio violation.

What does this all mean?

One of the best health care systems in the county will be under the legal control of the Massachusetts Nurses Association, a nurses' union, without benefit of collective bargaining.

A single union, to which not all nurses belong, will determine your and my health care in a hospital and whether and when we get admitted in the first place. Q#1 should really be called the Patient Unsafety Act.

Q#1 will undermine the financial stability of hospitals, especially nonprofit hospitals like our beloved Fairview Hospital. These mandatory imposed RN-to-patient ratios do not allow a hospital to make adjustment to other staffing or services to offset the costs of these mandatory RN ratios. Who will pay for Question #1, as it will increase the cost of hospital delivered services by estimates of \$760 million to 1 billion per year? All of us.

Q#1 is all about RNs. It says nothing about other nurses, such as LPNs or CNAs, who provide needed services. And most importantly, it doesn't speak to the possible negative impacts these

ratios may have when any of us needs medical care at a hospital. Make no mistake on these mandatory ratios, some are as high as 1RN to 1patient.

Think it through. What happens when you arrive at the hospital – you're having a heart attack or your child has just broken a leg – and the legally mandated RN ratio in the emergency department will be exceeded if the hospital accepts you or your child until another RN is called in and the mandated ratio restored? Does the hospital risk a \$25,000 fine to provide immediate care or do you get to wait? Not a good question to consider when your or your child's health is on the line.

If you came by ambulance, the ambulance staff cannot take you inside the emergency room or to any patient care unit unless you will be admitted. Heaven forbid the mandated RN ratio is exceeded by your arrival. Until the required ratio is restored, you get to wait in the ambulance where you will likely receive care from a doctor talking with the ambulance staff. That ambulance is now tied up until the ratio is restored. It's out of service for anyone else needing it. Do you want to risk waiting for that ambulance when your life depends on getting to the hospital?

Southern Berkshire Volunteer Ambulance Squad has three ambulances; if they are all in use, backup ambulances are called. Ambulance shortages are a serious problem in Berkshire County. Do you want to always assume that an ambulance will be available when you need it given the new care realities if Q#1 passes? What if there is a serious car accident or another event requiring medical care for several people asap? While mandatory RN ratios may be suspended during a state or nationally declared public health emergency, how often does Boston think of Western Mass? Do you really want to count on them?

I have been admitted to Fairview Hospital's emergency department several times in the past decade: twice for anaphylactic shock and once for a compound ankle fracture with the bone sticking through the skin and partial circulation cut off to my foot. I don't even want to think about outcomes if Q#1 were in effect. Would I have died or lost my foot?

Read the 6-page text of Q#1 for yourself: <http://www.mass.gov/ago/docs/government/2017-petitions/17-07.pdf>

Think hard before you vote. Should a union determine how you and your family get hospital care or when you're admitted? Do you want more government interference in your health care? Do you want to see Fairview Hospital's survival in doubt? If you answer NO to any of these questions, then vote NO on Q#1. None of this is a scare tactic; it's the truth. On November 6th, vote for your and your family health care interests, not the interests of a nurses' union. Vote NO on Q#1.

Rene Wood

Sheffield

The writer is a member of Fairview Hospital's Patient & Family Advisory Council.