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To the editor:

The American Nurses Association (ANA) urges all registered nurses to get the seasonal influenza vaccination and aims for a 100 percent vaccination rate through comprehensive and aggressive vaccination programs (“Mandate Flu Shots for Health Workers,” September 19). However, ANA believes mandatory vaccination policies should be put into practice only as part of a comprehensive infection control program and under conditions that ensure broad, fair, and non-discriminatory implementation.

ANA strongly advocates that hospitals implement comprehensive infection control programs to protect against seasonal influenza. While the seasonal influenza vaccine is one component of such a program, other crucial elements, such as the use of protective equipment like medical masks and adherence to hand-washing procedures, also are necessary to protect patients and health care personnel. And importantly, employer policy must encourage health care workers to stay home when sick.

A singular focus on vaccination does not take into consideration other viruses or the real possibility that the year’s influenza vaccine is not optimally effective. For example, in 2007-2008, the vaccine’s effectiveness was estimated at 44 percent in protecting against the influenza strains in circulation that year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That’s why a comprehensive program is the best protection against the spread of flu and other respiratory viruses.

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