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NEWS RELEASE



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ANA Supports Safe Patient Handling Measures in Congress To Improve Safety of Nurses and Patients

SILVER SPRING, MD – As a longtime advocate for safe patient handling programs, the American Nurses Association (ANA) applauds recent actions in Congress that would help improve patient safety and protect registered nurses and other health care workers from debilitating injuries that could force them from their professions.

ANA strongly supports “The Nurse and Health Care Worker Protection Act of 2009” (H.R. 2381), sponsored by Rep. John Conyers, (D-Mich.), and a House Resolution introduced today by Rep. Carolyn McCarthy, (D-N.Y.), as steps that would reduce musculoskeletal injuries resulting from manually lifting, repositioning, and moving patients. Studies have shown that about 12% of nurses who consider leaving the profession cite back pain as a factor, and 52% complain of chronic back pain. ANA believes such worker protection measures are crucial to addressing the nursing workforce shortage.

Health care facilities that effectively use assistive lifting equipment and devices can create safer work environments, improve quality of care for patients, and reduce work-related health care costs. The use of such technology improves the safety of patients by reducing the potential for patient injury from manual handling mishaps. .

Rep. McCarthy’s resolution notes that registered nurses and other health care workers are required to lift and transfer “unreasonable loads, with the average nurse lifting 1.8 tons on an eight-hour shift,” and that the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics rates registered nursing in the top 10 of all occupations reporting on-the-job injuries resulting in days away from work. This resolution will educate members of Congress, as well as others, about the need for safe patient handling and movement.

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“Considering the critical need to address the current nursing shortage and ensure patient safety, ANA believes it is time to put safe patient handling and movement practices into law instead of relying only on voluntary guidelines,” said ANA President Rebecca M. Patton, MSN, RN, CNOR. “ANA’s long track record on safe patient handling is solid and strong.”

For more than a decade, ANA has supported the use of an Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) Standard for safe patient handling and movement, rather than voluntary guidelines for health care facilities. Rep. Conyers’ bill would accomplish that, and would expand the standard to health care facilities not covered by OSHA. Moreover, the bill would protect all health care workers, not just direct care registered nurses.

ANA launched the ANA Handle with Care® Campaign in 2003 to advocate for policies and legislation that would result in the elimination of manual patient handling. Prompted by the ANA campaign, eight states have enacted safe patient handling legislation. This year, ANA established ANA’s Handle with Care Recognition Program™ to recognize health care facilities that have had a safe patient handling program in place for at least three years and meet high standards for program evaluation, planning, policy, and training.

“With the emphasis on action this year to improve the quality of health care, expand access and control costs, we can no longer afford the departure of registered nurses from the bedside because they can’t continue performing the physical requirements of the job due to chronic back pain and injuries,” said Patton. “The ANA is pleased that Representative Conyers and Representative McCarthy are addressing this crucial issue in the U.S. Congress. The nation’s 2.9 million registered nurses cannot wait.”

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The ANA is the only full-service professional organization representing the interests of the nation's 2.9 million registered nurses through its 51 constituent member nurses associations and its 24 specialty nursing and workforce advocacy affiliate organizations that currently connect to ANA as affiliates. The ANA advances the nursing profession by fostering high standards of nursing practice, promoting the rights of nurses in the workplace, projecting a positive and realistic view of nursing, and by lobbying the Congress and regulatory agencies on health care issues affecting nurses and the public.