

# Infant Health Safety

## Call to Action

We urge hospital administrators, health care providers and policymakers to take steps to ensure the optimal health and safety of infants and young children by heeding three important calls to action.

**When hospital procurement decisions are focused on cost, patients pay the price.**

### CALL TO ACTION

**Hospitals must include NICU and PICU clinicians in the procurement process for medications, devices, supplies and services to ensure vulnerable infants and young children receive the safest care possible.**



Hospital procurement is the process of purchasing medications, devices, and other supplies and services for use at the hospital. Procurement is a long process, usually completed by teams of doctors, nurses and other hospital staff. The process can be a determining factor in health outcomes for patients.

Some hospital procurement teams face pressure to keep costs low, so clinical staff have less input in the process than administrators. This can lead to the hospital purchasing products and services that present safety issues for certain patient populations.

### INFANTS AND CHILDREN ARE **NOT** LITTLE ADULTS.

The problem is especially pressing in neonatal and pediatric intensive care units.

For example, the hospital may procure a large inventory of tubing and syringe systems to be used across all hospital units. But these tubing and syringe systems can present serious safety issues for NICU patients.

Inefficient procurement processes can force clinicians to find workarounds, causing them to lose time with their patients. Inventory imbalances in the NICU and PICU can also force hospitals to delay or cancel procedures or treatments.

**NICU and PICU clinical staff members know the unique needs of their patients. Ensuring they are part of hospital procurement processes will promote the safest and best care possible for infants and young children.**

**Infants need medications and devices that are specifically designed and tested for them.**

## CALL TO ACTION

**Policies must prioritize and incentivize companies to develop medications and devices specifically for the neonatal and pediatric populations to ensure safe and optimal care.**



Infants and young children need care that is tailored to their needs and size. Infants are not tiny adults, yet they are often given smaller doses of adult medications or smaller sized adult medical devices.

## ADULT MEDICATIONS AND DEVICES THAT ARE ALTERED FOR BABIES CAN PRESENT **SAFETY CONCERNS.**

This practice can result in medication dosing errors or device safety issues, which can lead to poor patient outcomes.

For example, the pulse oximeter was made for adults but was often used on infants. Although the device saved many adult lives, it was not reliable when used on infants and children because they have reduced blood flow to their fingers and toes, which makes it harder to accurately measure oxygen saturation with the oximeter.

Clinicians recognized infants needed technology specifically for their size, and since then, innovators have developed new oxygen monitoring technologies specifically for infants.

But innovation for new medications and devices faces barriers. Innovation for this small group of patients can be costly and time consuming, and enrolling infants and children in clinical trials can be challenging. Providers also need to be willing to become early adopters of new technology.

It is important to ensure each patient in the NICU and PICU receives the highest quality of care during their hospital stay, which includes devices and medications that are specifically designed for their size and unique needs.

**Policies that incentivize and prioritize innovation, like patent extensions, priority review vouchers or tax credits, will ensure more innovation to meet the needs of infants and young children.**

**Suitable hospital staffing leads to positive patient outcomes.**

## CALL TO ACTION

**States should adopt policies that clearly outline acuity-based staffing guidelines, include nurses in decisions about staffing and support their mental health and well-being.**



Patients in the NICU and PICU require a high level of care from clinicians, including nurses and nurse practitioners. But when there are not enough clinicians in a unit, it presents a safety risk to patients and affects the mental well-being of clinicians.

Hospitals across the U.S. are facing severe nursing shortages for several reasons, including an aging nursing workforce, burnout, the COVID-19 pandemic, high turnover, lack of clinical educators and even understaffing itself.

## **BUT STEPS CAN BE TAKEN TO ADDRESS THESE SHORTAGES.**

The American Nurses Association's Principles for Nurse Staffing, for example, guides hospitals and other decision-makers in developing the processes and policies needed to improve nurse staffing.

Nursing workforce development programs are also essential to ensuring there are enough

nurses to treat patients. The Title VIII Nursing Workforce Reauthorization Act, which has not been reauthorized by Congress, supports important workforce development programs, strengthens nursing education at all levels and provides funding to increase nurse practice in rural and underserved communities.

Mental health support is also important to overcoming nursing shortages. Hospitals should consider mentorship programs, longer orientation sessions and mental health support to help prepare and support nurses for their critical role in patient care.

Adequate nurse staffing is vital for patient safety, the health care system and the well-being of nurses themselves.

**Adopting policies that set standards for staffing guidelines, including nurses in creating staffing plans and supporting the mental health and mentorship of nurses will ensure patients receive safe, personalized and high-quality care.**

**NCfIH** National Coalition  
for Infant Health  
Protecting Access for Premature Infants through Age Two

*The National Coalition for Infant Health educates and advocates on behalf of premature infants from birth to age two. NCfIH envisions safe, healthy infants whose families can access the information, care and treatment their babies need.*