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## **Nurses' working conditions improving, Union study shows**

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By Rebecca Vesely, STAFF WRITER

Registered nurses at California hospitals are reporting improvements in staffing conditions since a nurse-to-patient ratio law went into effect Jan. 1, the largest union representing RNs said Wednesday.

The California Nurses Association is interviewing nurses at hospitals around the state to gauge compliance with the new law.

Out of 111 acute care hospitals — 30 percent of all hospitals in the state — surveyed so far, registered nurses are reporting improved conditions at 68 percent of those facilities. Nearly 60 percent of those hospitals are in compliance of the new law, the nurses reported.

"A sizable majority of hospitals we looked at are making a good faith effort to abide by the law, and most have already seen results with improved conditions," Deborah Burger, president of the California Nurses Association, based in Oakland, said in a statement.

CNA praised Kaiser Permanente and the University of California Medical Centers for their preparedness in meeting the ratio law.

Enacted in 1999, the law made California the first state to establish the maximum number of patients that can be assigned to each nurse. Ratios range from one patient per nurse in trauma and intensive care units to eight patients per nurse in well-baby nurseries.

The California HealthCare Association, a trade group for hospitals, is challenging some of the regulations in court, arguing that the mandate doesn't allow for reasonable break times. A hearing has been set for next month in Sacramento County Superior Court.

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