



Unit Guidelines for Making Patient Assignments

SAFE CARE • BALANCED WORKLOADS • SUPPORT FOR SUCCESS

*Right Patient
Right Nurse
Right Time
Better Outcomes*



1 Know the Unit & Resources

Consider the environment and available support when making assignments.



- Unit specialty and typical patient population
- Available staff (RNs, LPNs, UAPs, resources)
- Bed capacity, admissions/discharges
- Available equipment and support services (e.g., respiratory, IV team, rapid response)

2 Match Patient Needs with Nurse Competence

Assign patients based on each nurse's knowledge, skills, and experience.



- Orientation status (novice vs. experienced)
- Competencies (e.g., telemetry, titratable drips, wounds, DM management)
- Previous assignment and current workload
- Consider nurse preference when safe and appropriate

3 Assess Patient Acuity and Complexity

Use objective tools and clinical judgment to group patients.



- Acuity level (e.g., stable, watch, unstable)
- Complexity (multiple comorbidities, isolation, complex procedures)
- Predictability (likelihood of change)
- Special considerations (behavioral health, EOL, palliative, language/cultural needs)

4 Create a Balanced Assignment

Distribute the workload fairly across the team.



- Balance high- and lower-acuity patients
- Vary task intensity (e.g., post-op with stable med-surg patients)
- Avoid clustering all complex patients with one nurse
- Consider time-sensitive care (medications, procedures, discharges)
- Account for non-patient care duties (precepting, charge support, committee roles)

5 Ensure Continuity and Consistency

Promote quality care and familiarity when possible.



- Keep the same nurse with a patient when feasible
- Consider ongoing education, rapport, and patient satisfaction
- Minimize frequent changes unless necessary (e.g., transfers, open beds, staffing changes)

6 Communicate Clearly

Provide a thorough and structured handoff of assignments.



- Use a consistent format (e.g., SBAR)
- Include key patient information and priorities
- Discuss expected admissions, discharges, and potential changes
- Clarify questions and confirm understanding
- Communicate any special needs or safety concerns

7 Reassess and Adjust

Assignments may need to change throughout the shift.



- Monitor patient changes in condition
- Be prepared to reassign or redistribute workload as needed
- Check in with the team regularly
- Seek help early when a nurse is overwhelmed or a patient's needs increase

Key Principles to Remember



- Safety first** – for patients and staff.
- Fairness** – consider acuity, complexity, and workload.
- Competence** – match patient needs with nurse skills and experience.
- Communication** – clear, respectful, and timely.
- Flexibility** – be ready to adjust as the situation changes.
- Support** – advocate for your team and use available resources.
- Consistency** – promote continuity of care when possible.

The Goal



A safe, balanced, and supportive patient assignment plan that enables every nurse to provide high-quality, compassionate care.

*Right Patients. Right Support.
A Stronger Team.*

