What’s a Nurse To Do?
Dealing with Technological Change and Work Restructuring in Health Care

Health care workplaces are experiencing rapid technological change and work restructuring. Computers are being introduced into every aspect of health care, from administrative and billing computers to computerized medicine dispensing systems and computerized diagnostic equipment. Employee monitoring is becoming commonplace, such as the active badge tracking systems which continuously report on employee whereabouts (some call it nurse LoJack). Communications technologies are being linked with computers and video capabilities to create tele-medicine. And work is being changed through job combination, cross-training, patient-focused care and other organizational “innovations.”

These changes are impacting working conditions for health care workers, as well as their ability to provide high quality care. Stress and musculoskeletal disorders are on the rise as a direct result of the changes in the work process, as are other injuries and illnesses. Long hours of work and mandatory overtime, both common in health care, have been shown to have negative health impacts.

In this paper, we will report on a project undertaken with two Massachusetts Nurses Association (MNA) units in the Worcester area to examine the forms that technological change and work restructuring are taking, to analyze their impacts on the nurses, their union, and their ability to provide care, and to develop and implement strategies which will give the nurses more of a voice in the changes that are occurring.

Charley Richardson
Labor Extension Program
University of Massachusetts
978-934-3266
Charles_Richardson@uml.edu