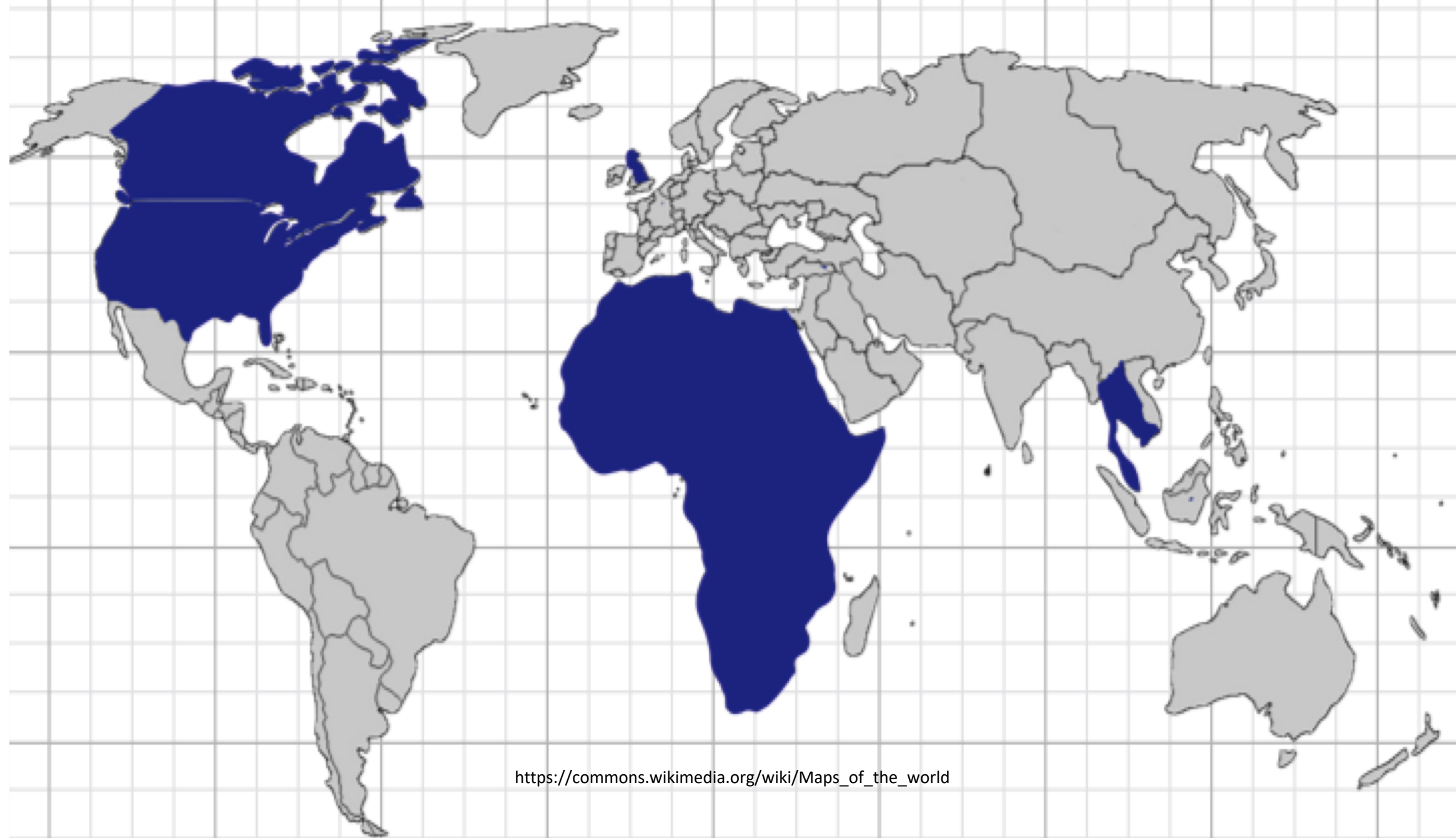


## Question:

In registered nurses (RNs), how do small nurse-to-patient ratios compared to large nurse-to-patient ratios influence nurse burnout?



## Background:

- 🔥 Nurse-to-patient ratios refers to the number of patients a nurse is responsible to care for during his/her shift.
- 🔥 Nurse burnout is a physical, mental, and emotional state caused by chronic overwork and a sustained lack of job fulfillment and support (“Nurse Burnout,” 2019).
- 🔥 The effects of burnout include high turnover rates, absenteeism, and reduced quality of patient care and affect nurses all over the world.
- 🔥 Job dissatisfaction in nurses is 4% greater than the average of all U.S. workers (Aiken et al., 2002).
- 🔥 “California is the only state that stipulates in law and regulations a required minimum nurse to patient ratio to be maintained at all times by unit” (ANA, 2015).

*This work is not original. This is a systematic review of published research conducted by professionals. Guidance provided by Stephanie Burkholder, professor of NU307: Evidence-Based Practice Research Methods.*

Study	Description	Results
“Hospital nurse staffing and patient mortality, nurse burnout, and job dissatisfaction” (Aiken, Clarke, Sloane, Sochalski, & Silber, 2002).	<b>Level IV, cross-sectional study</b> that surveyed Pennsylvania nurses to look at how nurse-patient-ratios impact nurse burnout, patient mortality, and failure to rescue (p. 2002).	43% of nurses experienced high emotional exhaustion. For each additional patient per nurse, burnout levels increased by 23% and job dissatisfaction increased by 15% (p 1990).
“Relationship between nurse staffing levels and nurse outcomes in community hospitals, Thailand” (Nantsupawat, Nantsupawat, Kulnaviktikul, & McHugh, 2015).	<b>Level IV, cross-sectional study</b> that looked at the relationship between nurse staffing levels and job dissatisfaction, emotional exhaustion in community hospitals in Thailand” (p. 114).	The average nurse-to-patient ratio was 1:11 per shift. 31.85% of nurses reported high emotional exhaustion (p 115).
“Registered nurse perception of patient assignment linking to working conditions and outcomes” (Choi & Miller, 2018).	<b>Secondary analysis and descriptive study</b> that looked at how nurse-to-patient ratios effect nurse outcomes, working conditions, and job satisfaction.	78% of RNs with ratios between 2-5 patients per nurse rated this assignment as appropriate (p 534). Nurses who reported appropriate ratios had high job satisfaction.
“The relationship between UK hospital nurse staffing and emotional exhaustion and job dissatisfaction” (Sheward, Hagen, Macleod, & Ball, 2005).	<b>Level IV, cross-sectional study</b> that surveyed Scottish and English nurses to explore the relationship between dissatisfaction and emotional exhaustion and workload.	27% of Scottish nurses and 35% of English nurses reported burnout. For Scotland and England the average nurse-to-patient ratio was 1:7 (p 55).
“Hospital restructuring, workload, and nursing staff satisfaction and work experiences” (Burke, 2003).	<b>Level IV cross-sectional study</b> that involved random surveying of members of the Ontario Nurses Association.	Nurses who reported an increase in nurse-to-patient ratios reported higher levels of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and greater workloads (p 104).
“A tale of two systems--nurses practice environment, well being, perceived quality of care and patient safety in private and public hospitals in South Africa: A questionnaire survey” (Coetzee, Klopper, Ellis, & Aiken, 2013).	<b>Level IV cross-sectional survey.</b> The aim was to “examine the practice environment...and nurse workforce outcomes in medical and surgical units in private and public hospitals in South Africa.”	45.8% of nurses scored in the high burnout range. Almost 1/3 were dissatisfied with their jobs. High nurse-to-patient workloads are associated with poor nurse reported quality of care, patient safety, and nurse workforce outcomes (p 170).

## Results:

- 🔥 Large nurse-to-patient ratios are associated with high burnout.
- 🔥 Lower, more appropriate nurse-to-patient ratios are correlated with higher job satisfaction, lower levels of emotional exhaustion, and less cynicism.
- 🔥 The relationship between large nurse-to-patient ratios is clear but it remains unclear what the ideal ratio should be.
- 🔥 Although the results are quite clear, there seems to be an unwillingness to accept these links because of the cost and workforce implications (Sheward et al.)



## Application:

- 🔥 These results allow nurses to advocate for their own well being.
- 🔥 Bring this issue to the chief nursing officer and work up the chain of command for policy changes.
- 🔥 Contact a state representative/senator to sponsor a bill for mandated nurse-to-patient ratios.
- 🔥 Nurses can reach out to the Montana Nurses Association and union representative to advocate for lower nurse-to-patient ratios.